

KINTNER-DUFFY, VICTORIA L., Ph.D. "Everybody's Different and the Same": An Inquiry into Early Childhood Teachers' Beliefs, Knowledge, and Practices in Relation to Children from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds. (2011)  
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In investigations of early childhood teacher preparation, there is little information provided regarding teachers' preparation to work with such diverse populations (Early & Winton, 2001). The purpose of this mixed-method inquiry was to examine the relationships among teachers' preparation, beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices as they work with culturally diverse children. The quantitative results demonstrated that teachers' beliefs predicted their knowledge, but not their observed or reported practices. Moreover, teachers' knowledge predicted their reported classroom practices with children from diverse cultures, but not their observed practices. The qualitative results showed that teachers' believe children to be simultaneously "all the same", but "have different needs". This was seen in their practices as they would try to "treat everyone the same", but incorporate only surface level changes to the classroom. These results also highlight that teachers' felt their personal and professional experiences were more influential to their classroom practices than their educational experiences. Overall, these results demonstrate a need for increased exposure to children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds, combined with increased personal, professional, and educational support for teachers. Implications for teacher preparation, policy, and research are discussed.

“EVERYBODY’S DIFFERENT AND THE SAME”: AN INQUIRY INTO  
EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS’ BELIEFS, KNOWLEDGE,  
AND PRACTICES IN RELATION TO CHILDREN  
FROM CULTURALLY DIVERSE  
BACKGROUNDS

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world (hooks, 1996)

#### **Child Care and Children from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds**

Studies have shown that children from diverse backgrounds are more likely to have negative academic outcomes, especially when there is a mismatch between their ethnic or linguistic backgrounds and that of their teachers (Dee, 2001; Johnson, Jaeger, Randolph, Cauce, Ward, & NICHD, 2003; Milner, 2005). For example, the achievement gap between European American children and those from other ethnicities and cultures in terms of children's academic success has been well documented by many scholars (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Moreover, Lee and Dallman (2008) noted that diverse children often experience "feelings of difficulty, loss, insecurity, alienation, isolation, and depression" (p. 36) because of problems navigating the differences in the language and cultural practices used at home versus those used at school. Such feelings of isolation may negatively impact children's perceptions of school, making it difficult to engage in and benefit from formal educational experiences. This lack of engagement in school can not only lead to poor academic achievement, but also to negative social and economic outcomes later in life

(Darling-Hammond; Ladson-Billings). Thus, the literature indicates that the needs of children from diverse backgrounds are not being met in the current structure and functioning of the early childhood care and education (ECCE) system.

### **Increases in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children**

Often referred to as a “melting pot”, the United States has a long history of becoming the home of immigrants from all over the world (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Nevertheless, the United States is currently experiencing a dramatic increase in people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This increase in culturally and linguistically diverse populations is also reflected in the current makeup of schools across the nation (Gay & Howard, 2000; Kyles & Olafson, 2008; Milner, 2005; Taylor & Sobel, 2001). Scholars have noted that approximately one-quarter of children in elementary and secondary schools are from ethnically diverse backgrounds and this number is expected to increase substantially in the coming years (Lee & Dallman, 2008). Specifically, by the year 2020, it is estimated that 39 to 50 percent of children in the U. S. education system will be from diverse backgrounds (Kyles & Olafson; Lee & Dallman). The figures for early childhood care and education (ECCE) are similar. Almost half (43%) of children under 5 in the U. S. are from ethnic backgrounds other than European American; many of these children also speak languages other than English and participate in a wide variety of cultural and social practices (Lim & Able-Boone, 2005).

Despite this widespread diversity in children across the nation, the demographics of teachers in ECCE, elementary, and secondary education do not reflect the ethnic, cultural,

and linguistic diversity of the children. At all levels of education for children, the majority (approximately 70 to 90 percent) of teachers are European American females from middle-class, monolingual backgrounds (Gay & Howard, 2000; Lubeck, 1996; Taylor & Sobel, 2001). Additionally, many of these teachers have little personal, educational, or professional experience with individuals from diverse backgrounds (Gay & Howard; Kyles & Olafson, 2008; Lim & Able-Boone, 2005; Maxwell, Lim, & Early, 2006; Milner, 2005) and often desire to teach in suburban, predominantly European American schools and neighborhoods (Taylor & Sobel). Further, in investigations of early childhood teacher preparation, there is little information provided regarding teachers' preparation to work with such diverse populations (Early & Winton, 2001).

### **Teachers' Education, Characteristics, and Classroom Practices**

Research in early childhood care and education regarding teachers' classroom practices has shown that classroom quality is important for a wide variety of children's outcomes including their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development (Burchinal & Cryer, 2003; Helburn, 1995). Thus, the quality of teachers' practices - conventionally defined as developmentally appropriate practices - has been a concern for research and practice for many decades. Although there are several avenues through which research has tried to understand what factors help create quality practices with young children, one of the primary methods has been to investigate the effects of increased, specialized teacher education (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Early & Winton, 2001; Tout, Zaslow, & Berry, 2006).

There has been rather extensive research regarding teacher education and quality classroom practices (Early, Maxwell, et al., 2007; Helburn, 1995; Howes, Whitebook, & Phillips, 1992; Tout et al., 2006). Much of this research has demonstrated a positive relationship between teacher education and classroom quality in that classrooms with teachers who have with higher levels of education and/or education in early childhood or child development also have higher levels of quality, in terms of materials, program structure, and teacher-child interactions (Howes et al.; Saracho & Spodek, 2007; Tout et al.). However, there have been recent, large-scale studies that demonstrate either no relationship or findings that demonstrate both positive and negative associations between teacher education and classroom quality (Early, Bryant, et al., 2006; Early, Maxwell, et al., 2007; Lo-Casale Crouch et al., 2007).

The presence of such mixed findings may indicate differences in research methods and populations of interest (Tout et al., 2006), a lack of clarity in the conceptualization of teacher education (Maxwell, Feild, et al., 2006), and a history of asking narrow questions about the relationship between teacher education and classroom practices (Bogard, Traylor, & Takanishi, 2008). Specifically, much of the research on teacher education and classroom practices has conceptualized a linear, straightforward relationship between these two constructs (Bogard et al.). However, recent evidence shows that the relationship between teacher education and classroom quality may be more complex and include various moderating and mediating pathways (Early, Bryant, et al., 2006; Tout et al.). Moreover, the construct of teacher education has been conceptualized and operationalized in a variety of ways including: years of education, highest level of

education, number of college credit hours, or major or specialization (Maxwell, Feild, et al.). Bogard et al. (2008) noted that the discussion on teacher education and the quality of classroom practices lacks information on the structure, content, and quality of teacher preparation programs. Future research needs to re-conceptualize teacher education to include specific components of programs experienced by pre-service teachers (Maxwell, Feild, et al., 2006; Saracho & Spodek, 2007). These conceptualizations should take into account what knowledge is necessary for quality teaching of all types of young children and what experiences are most helpful to teachers.

In addition to broadening current understandings of teacher education, there is some evidence that teachers' thought processes such as beliefs and knowledge are also important to consider when examining teachers' classroom practices (Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000; Maxwell et al, 2001). Theoretical and empirical work on teachers' thought processes suggests these constructs provide insight into what practices teachers value in their classrooms, how these practices are implemented, and teachers perceptions of their own readiness to work with children (Cassidy & Lawrence; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Maxwell et al.; Pajares, 1992). Further, this line of research also demonstrates positive linkages between increases in teacher education and changes in teachers' beliefs about and knowledge of quality practices (Buchanan, Burts, Bidner, & White, 1998; Cassidy, Buell, Pugh-Hoese, & Russell, 1995; McMullen & Alat, 2002; Rath, 2001). Research in multicultural education also highlights that teacher education may play an important role in informing and challenging teachers' beliefs about and knowledge of diverse children, as well as how teachers' beliefs about diverse children may influence



their practices (Gay & Howard, 2000; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). However, similar to studies investigating the relationship between teacher education and the quality of classroom practices, these studies have not examined the associations among all three components.

### **Purpose**

Given the increases in diversity in children in ECCE settings, potential negative developmental outcomes for children from culturally diverse backgrounds, and the lack of information regarding the characteristics of teacher education (specifically concerning diverse children and families), it is imperative that future research includes more comprehensive understandings of teachers' preparation, beliefs, and practices. Therefore, my overall purpose in this project was to examine the relationships among teachers' preparation, teachers' characteristics (e.g., their beliefs and preparedness), and teachers' classroom practices in their work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. I achieved this goal through an investigation of early childhood teachers' educational experiences, how these experiences are related to teachers' beliefs and knowledge, and how teachers' beliefs and knowledge predict teachers' classroom practices. Although understanding the relationships among teachers' education, characteristics, and practices is important in helping to create quality care and education for all young children, this study focuses on children from different cultural backgrounds than their teachers. Most often, children from culturally diverse backgrounds will be from non-European American ethnic backgrounds due to the historic marginalization of these groups in early education,

and the prevalence of European American teachers (Cannella, 1997; Gay & Howard, 2000; Lubeck, 1996). This study also aims to address some of the methodological limitations of previous studies by using a more comprehensive conceptualization of teacher education, and through the utilization of a mixed methods approach that includes interviewing, surveying, and observing teachers.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers' qualifications and characteristics have been noted as important areas for further inquiry in theory, research, and practice regarding teachers' work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, 2007). In particular, scholars have suggested that understanding teachers' preparation in higher education, beliefs and knowledge about children from culturally diverse backgrounds, and their classroom practices when responding to children's culture is essential to ensuring quality teaching and positive outcomes for all children (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). This study aims to examine these constructs and the relationships among them, specifically in relation to children from culturally diverse backgrounds. To do so, I first discuss the context of ECCE teacher preparation and the need for investigations into teacher preparation to work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Next, I outline what scholars have noted as the basic theoretical assumptions that should guide ECCE teacher preparation to encourage culturally responsive teaching. Third, I present the extant theoretical and empirical literature regarding teachers' education, beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices in relation to children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Finally, I address the limitations in the current research and describe how the current study contributes to our knowledge of teacher preparation for working with these children in ECCE settings.

## **The Context of Early Childhood Teacher Preparation**

Recent ECCE policies such as the Good Start, Grow Smart initiative, the reauthorization of the Head Start Act, and the development of early learning standards have called for increases in teacher qualifications. Although some of the response to these policies is to increase education standards for teachers and support for teachers who are continuing their education, scholars also noted that future research on the content and effectiveness of preparing teachers must be a component of these efforts (Martinez-Beck & Zaslow, 2006). Moreover, as discussed above, one particular area of need in teacher preparation is to help teachers in their work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. However, it is important to first understand the current context of and knowledge about ECCE teacher preparation for children from culturally diverse backgrounds before beginning an investigation into the relationships among teachers' preparation, beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices in relation to these children and families.

## **The Current State of ECCE Teacher Preparation**

There are an estimated 1,349 ECCE teacher preparation programs across the nation; approximately 55% are two-year institutions and the remaining 45% are four-year programs or institutions that confer graduate degrees. The majority of these programs (ranging from 61 to 74 percent) prepare teachers to work with infants, toddlers, preschool, and early elementary age children (Early & Winton, 2001; Maxwell, Lim, et

al., 2006). However, there is little information on the current structure and key components of these institutions, especially in regards to diverse children and families.

**Course and practica content.** There are a few descriptive studies of ECCE programs that demonstrate the wide variety of courses required for pre-service teachers (Early & Winton, 2001; Maxwell, Lim, et al., 2006). However, the percentage of courses required differed greatly according to topic. Most programs required courses on teaching methods (49% to 67%), discipline/guidance (57% to 65%), observation and assessment (58% to 65%), children with disabilities (67%), and children's learning environments (57%). The most frequently required class across all of the programs was preschool development and teaching methods (77%). Yet programs were less likely to require courses on working with diverse families and children (40%), and working with English-language learners (12%).

In addition to content courses, many of the preparation programs required practica courses; however, these practica often focused on the most common content areas such as preschool teaching methods or assessment. There were considerably fewer practica courses requiring experience with children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Early & Winton, 2001; Maxwell, Lim, et al., 2006). Specifically, the percentages of programs requiring these courses are similar to the overall content areas required. Almost all programs required practica with preschool-aged children (89% to 97%) and several required practica with infants/toddlers (62%), children with disabilities (41% to 60%), and working with families (49% to 64%). Unfortunately, there were fewer programs that required practical experiences working with English-language learners

(17% to 29%), and none specifically for working with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. It is important to note that it is possible there were children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds within students' practica settings. However, few of the practica had a specific focus on working with these groups of children.

**Faculty characteristics.** Scholars have also noted a lack of culturally diverse full-time faculty at the majority of these higher education institutions. According to Maxwell, Lim, et al. (2006), in 4-year institutions, the "typical" full-time faculty composition is 8.5% Black/African American, .9% American Indian, 3.7% Asian, 4% Latino, 4.1% other or not-identified, and 78.7% White/European American. Although the percentages for culturally diverse part-time faculty increase for African American (10%) and Latino (6.6%) teachers, the overall ethnic composition of faculty is overwhelmingly White. Unfortunately, 2-year institutions have similar faculty compositions. Specifically, at such schools full-time faculty members are approximately 9% African American, 1.2% American Indian, 2.1% Asian, 4% Latino, 1.5% other or not-identified, and 82.2% White/European American. Again, the percentages of African American and Latino teachers increase for part-time faculty, but only by 1.5% or 2%, respectively. Although a faculty members' culture or ethnicity does not determine their ability to teach in a culturally responsive manner, the lack of cultural diversity in faculty may limit the opportunities for both students and faculty to engage in meaningful experiences and dialogues about understanding and responding to children from culturally diverse backgrounds and families (Lim, Maxwell, Able-Boone, & Zimmer, 2009). Additionally,

the lack of diverse faculty may also make it more difficult to recruit and retain culturally diverse pre-service teachers (Early & Winton, 2001; Maxwell, Lim, et al., 2006).

Based upon current understandings of teacher preparation programs, there seems to be a lack of course content and practical experiences with children from culturally diverse backgrounds and families. Additionally, a large number of institutions do not have full-time, diverse faculty members. Finally, there is little information on teaching approaches or assignments used in these teacher preparation programs. What is known about specific classroom practices in such programs is based upon evaluations of individual courses or departments at singular institutions.

### **The Influence of Teacher Education on Classroom Practices**

Much of the previous research on teachers' educational experiences has examined how teachers' education (rather than teachers' preparation) predicts the quality of classroom practices. In the majority of these studies, scholars found a positive relationship between teachers' level of education and their practices. For example, in a critical, content analysis of 40 early childhood education studies regarding teacher education and classroom quality, Saracho and Spodek (2007) found that teachers' level of education was an important indicator of classroom practices. Specifically, the majority of the studies reviewed showed that teachers with a Bachelor's degree had higher quality classroom practices. Teachers with this level of education demonstrated more developmentally appropriate practices, included more instructional activities that encouraged higher-order thinking skills, and had more positive interactions with families.

Teachers with college degrees were also more likely to hold beliefs consistent with developmentally appropriate practices than teachers without degrees.

Furthermore, a review conducted by the National Research Council also determined that it is important for early childhood teachers to have a Bachelor's degree (Bowman et al., 2001). Again, teachers with higher levels of education held more developmentally appropriate beliefs. Teachers with Bachelor's degrees also used more effective teaching strategies including being responsive and adapting to children's needs, encouraging positive peer relationships, and using more positive behavior management techniques. Another review of 16 studies regarding teacher education and classroom quality found that most of the studies (13 of the 16) demonstrated that teacher education was a significant predictor of sensitivity in teacher-child interactions and global quality for child care centers and family child care homes (Tout et al., 2006).

Other studies have also shown mixed or insignificant relationships between teachers' education and classroom practices. For instance, Early and colleagues (2007) reanalyzed data from seven studies and found that only three of the seven studies demonstrated support for the relationship between education and quality of classroom practices. Specifically, these studies found that teachers' highest degree level predicted their scores on measures of global quality and teacher sensitivity. Additionally, these studies found a significant difference in global quality between those teachers with a Bachelor's degree or higher and those without such degrees. However, four of the seven studies demonstrated no relationship between teacher education level and quality of classroom practices.



Another study also found inconsistent links between teacher education and classroom practices, regardless of how the authors operationalized teacher education (Early, Bryant, et al., 2006). Whether teacher education was measured by years of education, highest degree, or Bachelor's degree versus no Bachelor's degree, teacher education was not associated with teachers' scores on either the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998) or the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2004). The only significant relationship found was that teachers with a Bachelors' degree as opposed to an Associate's degree had higher scores on the Teaching and Interactions factor on the ECERS-R. Additionally, the authors found that having a CDA (Child Development Associate) or other state certification was not associated with teachers' scores on classroom quality measures.

Findings from some studies also indicated that teachers' major or specialization is a predictor of classroom practices. Teachers who are specifically trained in early childhood development and education are more sensitive in their interactions with children than teachers with no specialized training (Howes et al., 1992; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 2001; Tout et al., 2006). However, the positive relationship between specialized education and classroom practices is not consistent. For example, a large-scale, national study attempted to parse out the differential effects of teachers' education level and specialization on the quality of classroom practices (Howes et al., 1992). According to the findings, teacher education level rather than specialized training in ECCE predicted the quality of classrooms. Specifically, teachers with higher levels of formal education

had higher global quality scores and were rated as more sensitive, less harsh, and less detached in their responses to children. McMullen and Alat (2002) also found that teachers' highest degree, but not specialized training, influenced the consistency of their beliefs with developmentally appropriate practices. Finally, using a cluster analysis, LoCasale-Crouch and colleagues (2007) found that differences in classroom quality profiles were not consistently linked to differences in teacher characteristics and education level. The percentages of teachers with Bachelor's degrees in early childhood education were similar across profiles, regardless of level of emotional climate or instructional quality. There was a significant difference, however, in classroom quality profiles between teachers who had Bachelor's degrees in early childhood education and teachers with no degree or certification.

Although there are many more studies that provide support for the relationship between teacher education and the quality of classroom practices, the use of large-scale, nationally representative data sets in the studies that have found inconsistencies in their findings demonstrate the need to explore this relationship further. Additionally, as noted earlier, there is need in future investigations to conceptualize teacher education in terms of the context of teachers' preparation and educational experiences rather than level of education (Bogard et al., 2008; Maxwell, Field, et al., 2005). One aim of the current study is to explore the relationship between teacher education and classroom practices, specifically in terms of the context of teachers' experiences in higher education and how such experiences may influence teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices.

### **Teachers' Beliefs about Children from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds**

According to Early and Winton, “while 54% of teachers taught students who had limited English proficiency or were from cultural backgrounds different than their own, only 17% felt very well prepared to meet the needs of these students” (p. 287). Often, teachers also express intimidation in even approaching the topic of culture because of fear in offending children and families or drawing attention to children’s differences (Bernhard, Lefebvre, Chud, & Lange, 1995; Lim & Able-Boone, 2005).

Correspondingly, many teachers decide to teach in predominately White, middle- to upper-class neighborhood and schools (Castro, 2010), thereby avoiding teaching in or dealing with the complexities of a multicultural classroom.

Several scholars have found that pre-service and in-service teachers frequently operate from a deficit model when working with children from diverse backgrounds (Gay & Howard, 2000; Hoy et al., 2006). Specifically, Bernhard et al. (1995) asked in-service, preschool teachers to discuss their perceptions of two randomly selected children from their classroom: One child was identified as coming from the dominant (i.e., White) culture and one child was from a diverse cultural and/or linguistic background. Although many of the reported children’s strengths were similar across groups (i.e., teachers noted both children as quick learners and very sociable), teachers also reported that the diverse children had more difficulty with language skills and often had more problems interacting with adults. Teachers also tend to have low expectations for the learning and achievement of children from culturally diverse backgrounds when operating from this deficit model (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). For example, in a study which asked pre-service teachers to

speculate about children's academic abilities, social competencies, and problem behaviors based upon children's photographs, findings showed that the teachers consistently rated African American children lower than European American children in academic (e.g., GPA and IQ) and social (e.g., ambition, self-confidence, initiative) domains (Richman, Bovelsky, Kroovand, Vaca, & West, 1997).

Correspondingly, in interviews with teachers in a masters' level diversity course, Milner (2005) found that teachers tended to use racial and cultural stereotypes to interpret children's needs and plan for lessons. Milner also noted that teachers frequently operate from a "color-blind" perspective, causing them to hold negative and unrealistic expectations of diverse children. Specifically, at the end of the course one of the teachers stated, "I'm not treating the individuals any differently. I don't treat the whites any different than the black students [or] the Asian students" (p. 780). Hoy et al. (2006) suggests that teachers' color-blind beliefs may actually have detrimental effects on children because teachers do not recognize the "cultural capital" (p. 719) that children bring to the classroom. Furthermore, Milner points out that deficit and color-blind perspectives also work to maintain the status quo, as teachers only understand teaching and learning from a European American view, which may further alienate already marginalized children.

Unfortunately, a recent review of research demonstrates that teachers' negative perspectives of cultural diversity have been persistent throughout almost three decades of work (Castro, 2010). During what Castro has termed the "initial phase of research" (p.200) on multicultural education (i.e., from 1986 to 1994), studies indicated that

teachers did not identify culture as an important component in students' development or learning, and that teachers often expressed unwillingness to engage in partnerships with the families from diverse backgrounds in their classrooms. In one study, the authors found that almost 70% of the teachers felt "uncomfortable associating with people who had different cultural values than they did" (Castro, p. 201). Research between the years of 1995 and 1999 again showed that many teachers held deficit or stereotypical views of children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Overall, teachers indicated that they did not want to teach culturally diverse or urban students because they believed that such children were neither interested in nor able to achieve academically. In fact, in one study a pre-service teacher expressed, "I wanted to teach White children because it is rumored that they are the smartest and easiest to teach" (Tiezzi & Cross, 1997, as cited in Castro, p. 203). Such negative attitudes may prevent teachers from even trying to engage and interact with children from different backgrounds (Castro; Gay & Howard, 2000).

Research since the year 2000 shows that for some teachers, their beliefs about children from culturally diverse backgrounds and multicultural education are becoming more positive. Castro (2010) discussed a few studies in which teachers reported agreeing with the basic tenets of culturally responsive teaching and felt that diversity in education was positive for society. However, other studies during this period highlighted that teachers still held negative views of multicultural education. For instance, pre-service teachers at predominantly White universities (public and private) were still less willing to teach in multicultural settings and expressed low expectations for children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Overwhelmingly, in all three time periods, teachers seemed to have very simplistic understandings of culture and multicultural issues in education and children's development. Even when teachers' general beliefs regarding cultural diversity were more positive, teachers did not have understandings of systemic or institutional forms of racism, oppression, or inequity in education or how these would affect children's learning. Across the majority of studies, teachers' perspectives reflected an individualistic worldview in which any educational problems were because of individual children's issues and not structural factors. According to Castro (2010),

this tendency toward oversimplification can make multicultural ideas less threatening, less political. Pre-service teachers may readily advocate and clamor for multicultural education that support a tolerance approach to diversity without achieving the critical consciousness necessary to dismantle structural inequality and interrogate dominant cultural assumptions embedded in these structural arrangements (p. 206).

Taken together, the research on teachers' beliefs points to a need for more intentional preparation for pre-service teachers regarding multicultural education, as well as more in-depth examinations of personal beliefs and institutional forms of oppression (Gay, 2000). The current study aims to investigate teachers' beliefs regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds and teachers' experiences in higher education that dealt with multicultural issues.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Conceptual Definitions**

Discussing teachers' preparation regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds would be a confusing and arduous process without explicit definitions of relevant constructs. Therefore, I present the following definitions that will be used to guide the conceptual framework and methodology of this study. It is important to note here that the constructs of culture, beliefs, and even knowledge are multidimensional; thus, these definitions are limited and include only the dimensions that are most germane to the current study.

**Culture.** Broadly, culture refers to a system of beliefs, values, customs, and language that inform individual and group understandings of and behaviors in the world. Inherent in this construct is the dynamic nature of culture as people, and cultures are in a constant and reciprocal state of change (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Gay, 2000). Although children from culturally diverse backgrounds are usually defined as those children from ethnic minority groups, this study will also focus on children who have different cultural backgrounds than their ECCE teachers. Thus, this study will include teachers who are European American and working with children from ethnic minority groups, as well as teachers from non-European American backgrounds working with children from either a European American background or a different ethnic minority background (e.g., Latino). Briefly, culturally responsive teaching is then the pedagogical process of valuing and learning about children's cultures, as well as creating an environment which incorporates

these cultures into daily classroom practices (Gay). (This theory is discussed in more detail later in this chapter).

**Teacher preparation.** Although much of the previous literature has conceptualized teacher education as teachers' highest degree and college major (Maxwell, Feild, & Clifford, 2005), the current study is focused upon the construct of teacher preparation. Thus, teacher preparation is conceptualized as teachers' experiences in higher education including the content of their courses and assignments, teaching approaches used by and interactions with faculty, and their field work during practica courses (Bogard et al., 2008). In the following framework, when using previous studies that have measured teachers' degree or major, I will refer to this construct as teacher education. However, when discussing the current study, I use the terms teacher preparation, or educational experiences, as these reflect a more comprehensive picture of the educational process for ECCE teachers.

**Teachers' beliefs.** Beliefs are difficult to define as they are not observable entities and can refer to perspectives on a variety of subjects. Nevertheless, these constructs have been identified as important components of teachers' thought processes (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Daniels & Shumow, 2003; Pajares, 1992). For example, teachers may have beliefs about the importance of education, appropriate classroom activities and interactions, and how to relate to children's families, as well as personal philosophies on child development and behavior. Though all of these elements are important to understanding teachers' beliefs, the current study specifically emphasizes teachers' beliefs regarding culture, and culturally responsive teaching. Teachers' beliefs, then, are



defined as individuals' "representation[s] of reality that [have] enough validity, truth, or credibility to guide thought and behavior" (Harvey, 1986, as cited in Pajares, 1992).

**Teachers' knowledge.** The construct of knowledge can also encompass several aspects of teachers' roles in caring for and educating children (Verloop, van Driel, & Meijer, 2001). Thus, teachers' knowledge may refer to their knowledge of pedagogy, child development, educational policy, or center/school organization. For the current study, teachers' knowledge is described as teachers' cognitions, awareness of, insights on, and decision making processes about culture, child development, and educational pedagogy that provide the bases for their classroom practices (Verloop et al.). This knowledge does not only include the intellectual aspects of knowledge that are gained through formal education, but also consists of teachers' experiential knowledge acquired through life circumstances. According to Pajares (1992), it is impossible to separate the constructs of beliefs/attitudes and knowledge. However, Verloop and colleagues distinguish these concepts; in general, beliefs and attitudes involve personal perspectives and values whereas knowledge represents cognitive understandings. From this view, teachers' beliefs and attitudes function to organize, prioritize, and give value to teachers' knowledge.

**Classroom practices.** ECCE teachers engage in a variety of actions and practices in their classrooms each day. These actions can include: procedural routines (e.g., taking attendance or preparing children's meals and snacks); structural tasks (e.g., arranging the environment or selecting materials/curriculum); personal and instructional interactions (e.g., social and instructional conversations with children or behavior guidance

strategies); and planning responsibilities (e.g., observation and assessment of children, planning and adapting activities for children) (Cassidy et al., 2005; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). For this study, the overarching construct of teachers' classroom practices is divided into three primary constructs: materials and classroom structure, teacher-child interactions, and pedagogical adaptation. Materials and classroom structure refers to the types and amounts of materials used in the classroom, as well as how the classroom is structured to allow children's access to these materials (Cassidy et al.).

The broad construct of teacher-child interactions indicates verbal or non-verbal communication or activity involving the teacher and one or more children in the classroom; such teacher-child interactions "are a primary mechanism through which classroom experiences affect development" (La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004, p. 412). Within teacher-child interactions, I will focus specifically on the three components identified in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation tool (CLASS Pre-K; Pianta et al., LaParo, & Hamre, 2008). The first aspect of teachers' warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness to children is related to the CLASS domain of Emotional Support. Indicators include teachers' tone of voice, emotional affect, regard and respect for children, and ability to perceive and respond to children's developmental needs. Second is behavior guidance, which involves teachers' expectations for children's behaviors, as well as the ways teachers direct children to appropriate classroom behaviors. This construct is outlined in the CLASS domain of Classroom Organization. Third, instructional activities refer to those interactions specifically geared towards facilitating children's cognitive development such as the use of classroom materials, instructional

statements and questions, and expansion of children's language. In the CLASS, this construct is referred to as Instructional Support (La Paro et al.; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2007).

In the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) position statements on developmentally appropriate practices and culturally competence practices, there is an emphasis on the need to individualize and adapt pedagogy and classroom practices to the needs of each child. Teachers' pedagogical adaptations are defined as the accommodations to materials, interactions, and activities made by teachers to meet individual children's developmental needs (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2009). In the current study, the classroom practices of materials/structure and interactions will be in reference to all of the children in the class, regardless of cultural background. However, the construct of teachers' pedagogical adaptations is conceptualized only in relation to how teachers adapt their practices to meet the needs of children from culturally diverse backgrounds. If teachers use learning materials and change teaching styles according to children's cultures, they would be implementing culturally responsive pedagogical adaptations.

### **Pedagogical Theories for Multicultural Teacher Preparation**

Overall, the literature on teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and preparation concerning children from culturally diverse backgrounds indicates that future research is necessary to move the field forward. This work should include investigations of teachers' beliefs,

knowledge, and classroom practices, as well as what kinds of higher education experiences are helpful in cultivating more positive beliefs and encouraging competence in all types of teacher knowledge in early childhood teachers. Theoretical and empirical work on the most effective methods of challenging teachers' current beliefs, knowledge, and practices and moving them to a deeper understanding of and appreciation for multicultural issues, suggests that constructivism, relational pedagogy, feminist or critical perspectives, and culturally responsive teaching all offer important insights into meaningful teacher preparation (Gay, 2000; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). The discussion below presents the basic tenets for these theories specifically in comparison to "traditional" methods of teaching that rely on teachers as authoritarian providers of knowledge, as well as how these theories may inform the current study.

### **Constructivism**

Constructivism, as put forth by Dewey (1938), has been applied to almost all levels of education. This educational theory is founded on the epistemological perspective that knowledge is constructed and that students can and should actively participate in the construction of knowledge. From this understanding, Dewey critiqued traditional forms of education that did not allow students to engage in experiences that provided opportunities for them to create relevant, lasting knowledge. Instead, Dewey noted that traditional education focused only on students gaining information about content or facts and being able to retain this information for assessment.

Since the time of Dewey, other scholars have further explicated the theoretical propositions and applied them to education in general and teacher preparation in particular (Brookes & Brookes, 1993; Bufkin & Bryde, 1996; Dangel & Guyton, 2003; Fink, 2003; Hamilton & Hitz, 1996; Richardson, 1997). For example, Brookes and Brookes outlined five principles that serve as framework for the creation of constructivist classrooms. Each of these principles is rooted in the perspective that the learning process is not linear, but “idiosyncratic [and] often paradoxical” (Brookes & Brookes, p. viii). First, in constructivist classrooms it is essential that teachers value students’ prior experiences and current understandings as students use their experiences to make sense of new information. Rather than traditional teaching methods that position teachers as the ultimate authority and focus upon lectures from which students receive knowledge, constructivist teaching methods are learner-centered and provide avenues for teachers and students to co-construct knowledge (Bufkin & Bryde, 1996; Fink). It also important that teachers create a safe environment in which all students feel valued and free to express themselves, thereby providing students the ability to focus on exploration and learning (Baum & King, 2006).

Second, in constructivist classrooms teachers provide students with learning opportunities that challenge their current thinking and interpretations (Brookes & Brookes, 1993). Thus, constructivist educators emphasize critical thinking and self-reflection rather than using rote memorization as a teaching strategy. This is enacted in classrooms by encouraging interactive dialogue, helping students explore the reasons behind concepts and information, and creating room for creativity (Dangel & Guyton,

2003). Teachers can also use hands-on, experiential activities, as well as reflective assignments to guide students as they construct new understandings (Brookes & Brookes; Fink).

Similarly, teachers in constructivist classrooms use “problem-posing” strategies to encourage students’ engagement in the construction of knowledge (Fink, 2003; Freire, 1970; Hamilton & Hitz, 1996; Richardson, 1997). Instead of providing answers to students or asking questions that have “correct” answers, teachers should ask questions that extend students’ thinking and help them reflect on the learning process (Brookes & Brookes, 1993). As in the second principle, helping students explore their meta-cognitive processes, emotions, and perspectives, as well as those of others helps them to develop critical-thinking skills. Several scholars noted that when engaging students in dialogue, teachers must be careful to allow students time to process information and investigate all points of view surrounding the issue (Baum & King, 2006; Dangel & Guyton, 2003; Fink).

The fourth principle is primarily applicable to courses about specific subject matter such as math, science, art, or language (Brookes & Brookes, 1993). Frequently, teachers of content areas have a difficult time applying constructivist principles to their teaching because of curricular constraints (Richardson, 1997). However, Brookes and Brookes highlighted the importance of teaching students about broader concepts or the “big ideas” instead of specific facts or pieces of information. According to Fink (2003), learning how to learn includes developing the ability to analyze and synthesize information, adapt to change, reflect upon their own learning processes, and engage in self-directed learning.

Finally, the fifth principle states that teachers should use daily observation and meaningful forms of assessment to evaluate students' learning (Brookes & Brookes, 1993; Bufkin & Bryde, 1996). From a constructivist perspective, standardized, multiple choice tests and grades reduce students' experiences to a letter or number, as well as encourage hierarchy in the classroom (Baum & King, 2006; Fink, 2003). Traditional forms of assessment may also hinder creativity and diminish students' interest and energy toward learning (Brookes & Brookes). On the other hand, providing meaningful feedback (i.e., comments and questions that further their thinking or having students engage in self-assessment) to students further encourages self-reflection, acts as a catalyst for growth, and allows students to become owners of their learning (Dangel & Guyton, 2003). Possibilities in the literature include having students choose assignments that are most relevant to them or create and defend portfolios of their work (Brookes & Brookes; Bufkin & Bryde; Dangel & Guyton).

### **Relational Pedagogy**

Other scholars have also critiqued more traditional forms of education from a different perspective. Specifically, this critique comes from the lack of relationship between teachers and students in traditional classrooms (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Critics also note that traditional models do not teach students how to relate to one another or care for each other and the world (Noddings, 2002). Moreover, the valuing of universal knowledge and the focus upon memorization and debate as learning strategies ignores the social nature of teaching and learning (Belenky & Stanton,

2000; De Lair & Erwin, 2000; Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Therefore, scholars have theorized that education should be founded on the ethic of care and be based on relationships. From this perspective, every human being can care for others and needs to be cared for. The goal of education should be to help students learn to care for others, thereby understanding each person as a valued part of the community and the world (Noddings).

Relational pedagogy, then, is grounded in the theoretical position that all learning (and knowledge production) takes places socially through interaction (Belenky et al., 1986). Thus, teaching and learning are processes that are connected to the lives of students and teachers. There are several components to relational pedagogy or “connected teaching”. First, all educational processes begin with the establishment of trusting relationships among teachers and students, as well as peers (Belenky et al.; Noddings, 2002; Stremmel, 2005). Teachers employing a relational perspective need to take time to get to know the students, operate from a strengths-based perspective, and demonstrate genuine care for each student (Baum & King, 2006; Noddings). This also requires that teachers begin courses and lessons with an understanding of students’ current identities, epistemologies, and perspectives (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2006). Belenky et al. also noted that relational pedagogy changes the role of teacher from a “banker” to a “mid-wife” who acts as facilitators of students’ learning processes and help to “draw out” students’ knowledge rather than provide knowledge to students. Furthermore, teachers also model their own learning processes in order to demonstrate to students that their knowledge is never “completed”.



Second, education from this perspective values all ways of knowing and learning (Belenky et al., 1986; Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Therefore, this pedagogical approach honors both academic or formal knowledge and experiential or ordinary knowledge (Noddings, 2002). Every student's voice and prior experience are valuable as they shape students current and future identities. Thus, lecture and debate are not appropriate ways to teach students as these methods frequently marginalize students, especially female students and those from diverse backgrounds (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al.). Instead, teaching should incorporate collaboration and dialogue to co-construct knowledge (Noddings). Additionally, teaching strategies should vary according to students' needs and interests, rather than be universally applied to all students and all topics (Baum & King, 2006; Belenky et al.).

Another essential component to relational pedagogy is that themes of care and ethical dilemmas should be an essential part of all lessons (Noddings, 2002). A common critique of relational pedagogy is that logic and reason are absent from the classroom. However, this is a grave misunderstanding of this perspective; because relational pedagogy values all ways of knowing, both logical and emotional knowledge is welcomed in the classroom (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Specifically, relational teachers encourage critical thinking and logical analysis of course content, but ground this content in understandings of virtue, ethics, and a moral responsibility to care for all humans.

Finally, as the nature of caring is often perceived as uniquely feminine, it is important to note that much of relational pedagogy is informed by feminist thinking and women's

ways of knowing (Belenky et al., 1986; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Noddings, 2002).

Nevertheless, the pedagogical approach is not only for women or to be employed by female teachers. Rather the use of this approach can encourage the development of situated ethics, connected knowing, and critical thinking in all students (Noddings). Moreover, relational pedagogy can help all learners to view themselves as “knowers”, thereby empowering them to become self-directed learners and engage in future learning endeavors with confidence (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al., Belenky & Stanton, 2000).

### **Feminist and Critical Perspectives**

Although constructivism and relational pedagogy both provide a critique of traditional models of education, only relational pedagogy offers an explicit focus on the unequal power relations that are created through traditional forms of education (Belenky et al., 1986; Belenky & Stanton, 2000). That said, even relational pedagogy has been criticized for ignoring aspects of diversity other than gender (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Therefore, the field of ECCE teacher preparation must also look to critical and feminist pedagogical theories to explore teaching approaches that are relevant for all students.

Critical perspectives begin with similar critiques of traditional education held by constructivism. From Freire’s (1970) point of view, traditional education is conducted as a “banking model” in which teachers treat knowledge as truth and deposit it into students. However, Freire’s perspective departs from constructivism to acknowledge the power relations that are maintained through the banking model. Specifically, Freire states that

banking models privilege only one way of knowing and dehumanizes those students who are not proficient in this particular form of knowledge. Further, this model also diminishes students' capacities to engage in critical reflection (also called critical consciousness), thereby ensuring that oppressed students will not participate in their own transformation and liberation (Freire, 1973). To challenge the inequalities and encourage the oppressed to work towards their own liberation, Freire (1970) called for a model of education built upon critical reflection and honoring multiple ways of knowing.

Over the past few decades, other scholars have joined Freire in challenging forms of education that do not acknowledge education as a political act of liberating the oppressed (Cannella, 1997; hooks, 1994). Again, these critiques state that only one particular way of knowing, teaching, and learning is valued and that this way oppresses those individuals that do not fit that model (Belenky et al., 1986; Cannella). Thus, the scholars emphasize that teaching and knowing should work to change unequal power relations both with women and other diverse populations. According to these theorists, there are several principles that should guide this pedagogical work. First, teachers working from a critical perspective should accept knowledge as constructed and thus, question the authoritative role of teacher from an epistemological standpoint (Cannella; De Lair & Erwin, 2000). Again, this highlights the understanding that teacher should act as facilitator and empower students to collaborate in the classroom as equal participants in the construction of knowledge (Belenky et al.; Hayes & Flannery, 2000).

Second, teachers must understand that race, culture, gender, religion, class, and sexual orientation are present in the classroom context and influences students' learning

(Cannella, 1997; De Lair & Erwin, 2000). Additionally, teaching from a critical perspective also requires that teachers demonstrate ways in which social structures and interactions maintain inequality and oppress students based upon the above categories and characteristics (Cannella; hooks, 1994). Thus, it is important that teachers help students learn to reflect upon their own identities and experiences and how these identities are situated within sociohistorical contexts. This reflection upon social structures, personal identities, and political influences on learning provides a way for students to transform both their own identities and oppressive social structures (De Lair & Erwin; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; hooks).

A third component of critical pedagogy is allowing all students to have a voice in the learning community (Freire, 1973; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; hooks, 1994; Lubeck, 1996). Similar to relational pedagogy, this principle is built upon the idea that all students' experiences and ways of knowing and learning are valued in the classroom (Belenky et al., 1986). Teachers foster safe, collaborative environments in which students can learn from dialoguing with one another (Lubeck). Through this dialogue, teachers also work to help students integrate their various ways of knowing and find confidence in using their voice to express their knowledge (Freire; Hayes & Flannery). It is crucial to note that "safe" does not mean conflict free. Rather a safe environment for students and teachers is really a community to which everyone can contribute and all voices have value (hooks, 1994).

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Much of the literature reviewed thus far indicates that many teachers, especially European American teachers, seem to disregard or negate the importance of including culture when teaching. Gay (2000) describes this perspective as “cultural blindness” (p. 21). Teachers who operate from this point of view do not understand the Eurocentric pedagogical approaches that guide most educational practices in the United States, and thus ignore the important cultural values and practices that both students and teachers bring to the classroom. To combat this harmful paradigm, Gay presents an alternative perspective known as culturally responsive teaching. As Pai (1990) noted, “There is no escaping the fact that education is a sociocultural process. Hence, a critical examination of the role of culture in human life is indispensable to the understanding and control of educative processes” (as cited in Gay, p. 9). Thus, the grounding framework of culturally responsive teaching is that culture matters in human development and education, and should be understood and included explicitly in all educational processes.

Gay outlines six primary characteristics of culturally responsive teaching and how they can inform teachers’ daily practices with their students. The first component is that culturally responsive teaching operates from a strengths based model in which students’ cultural knowledge and experiences are valued and validated in the course. Students are encouraged to discuss their own culture, as well as those of their classmates, and teachers use various techniques to engage diverse students and include important connections between home and school into the curricula. In this context, teachers also function as cultural mediators, helping students understand, honor, and analyze various cultural

contexts. According to NAEYC (2009), the acknowledgement and respect of children's [or students] culture and home language is essential to ensuring the "optimal development and learning of all children" (p. 2).

Second, culturally responsive teaching is collaborative and emphasizes holistic instruction (Gay, 2000). This principle recognizes that intellectual development and academic achievement are inseparable from students' social, emotional, and even spiritual or political development and growth. Therefore, teachers should promote the social construction of knowledge through collaborative learning, and incorporate dialogue and assignments that utilize multiple ways of knowing (Belenky et al., 1986). Similarly, Gay discusses the multidimensional nature of culturally responsive teaching. Specifically, this refers to the importance of weaving elements of students' culture into all aspects of the classroom regardless of particular subject matter or situational context. Again, this requires teachers to use multiple ways of knowing such as emotional knowledge or cultural values alongside factual or theoretical propositions.

When students' cultures and perspectives are valued during the educational process, they often experience empowerment and learn to view themselves in a positive light (Gay, 2000). This element of culturally responsive teaching is especially important for culturally diverse students who are often marginalized through more traditional educational techniques of lecture and standardized testing. Teachers who aim to empower their students build relationships with students, hold positive expectations for students, and honor their achievements. Furthermore, teachers can also empower their students by providing opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning and

taking a less authoritative role in guiding classroom structure and processes.

Additionally, Gay highlights that culturally responsive teaching is not only empowering, but also transformative. Students are personally transformed through achieving their academic goals while retaining their cultural identities. Moreover, in line with Freire's (1970) proposition of critical consciousness, students also learn to transform their environment and current cultural hegemony through gaining skills of critical reflection.

Finally, Gay (2000) notes that culturally responsive teaching is emancipatory for the students themselves. Students who are validated, empowered, and transformed are then liberated to be themselves in the classroom without fear of being ignored or oppressed because of their cultural identity. Again, "these learning engagements encourage and enable students to find their own voices, to contextualize issues in multiple cultural perspectives, to engage in more ways of knowing and thinking, and to become more active participants in shaping their own learning" (Gay, p. 35). For historically marginalized students, this freedom becomes important in helping students achieve academic, social, and emotional success.

To summarize, each of the above theories critique traditional modes of education and provide a model in which: 1) all types of knowledge and ways of knowing are valued and incorporated into classroom interactions, 2) teachers are no longer the absolute authority, but act as facilitators of the educational process, 3) students are empowered through collaborative work and self-reflection, 4) students' cultural capital and personal experiences are included in all aspects of the classrooms, and 5) systemic inequalities are challenged and changed. In the current study, I use these four pedagogical perspectives to

demonstrate what types of educational experiences have been posited as important in helping early childhood teachers reflect critically on their own beliefs and work towards changing their beliefs and knowledge to be more culturally responsive (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Although I understand that many teacher preparation programs do not apply these perspectives to courses and teaching approaches, these pedagogical theories will provide a backdrop against which I can locate and understand the context of teachers' educational experiences. For example, if teachers' educational experiences do not align with one or more of these theories, this may serve to highlight reasons that changes in their beliefs or knowledge were not effective or meaningful. Thus, comparing teachers' educational experiences to these pedagogical theories will allow me to examine if such experiences were effective for teachers in terms of working with children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

### **Teachers' Beliefs, Knowledge, and Classroom Practices**

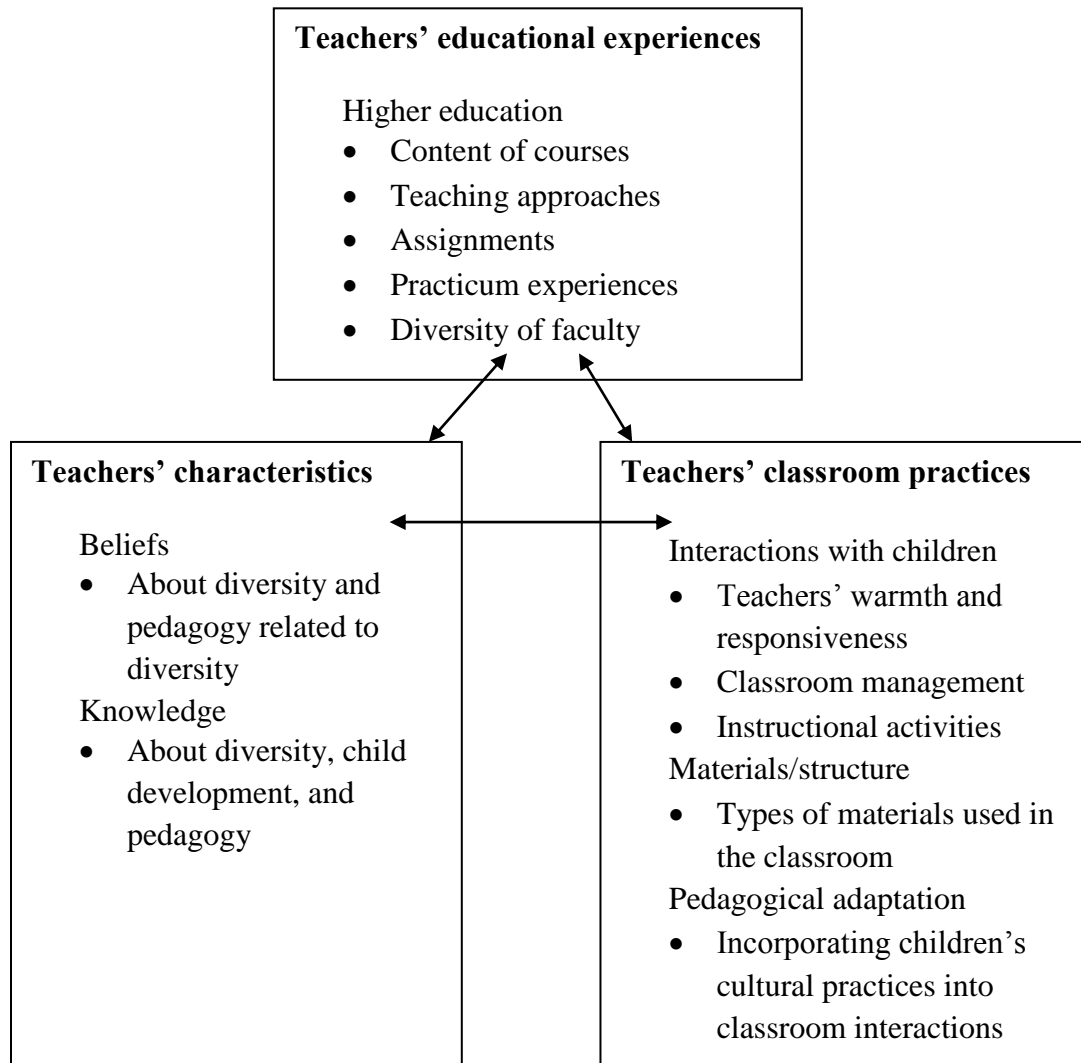
Over the past three decades, teachers' beliefs and knowledge and how these constructs are related to teachers' classroom practices have been important concepts in teacher education research (Munby, Russell, & Martin, 2001; Ostrosky, Laumann, & Hsieh, 2006). However, there is less research specifically on teachers' beliefs regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds and how teachers' preparation may influence their beliefs and knowledge in multicultural classrooms. The following review of the theoretical origins of teachers' beliefs and knowledge, as well as the current



empirical literature on the relationships among teachers' preparation, beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices, will demonstrate the gaps in our knowledge and begin to address ways in which future research may address these issues. Figure 1 displays graphically how these concepts function to influence one another.

Figure 1

*Overall conceptual model for the relationships among teachers' educational experiences, characteristics and classroom practices*



## **Origins of Teachers' Beliefs**

Theoretical work about beliefs suggests that beliefs originate from three sources: personal, educational, and professional experiences (Bandura, 1989; Hoy et al., 2006). More specifically, social cognitive theory states that individuals form symbolic representations based upon social interactions and observations of others in a variety of settings. These representations then become internalized as beliefs over the life course as individuals learn from watching and interacting with others (Bandura). Therefore, teachers' beliefs regarding children, diversity, and teaching and learning may be based upon social interactions and practices with their own family and culture, as well as information learned through formal schooling and practical experiences in a variety of professional settings. Hoy and colleagues also noted the ecological origins of teachers' beliefs. Specifically, teachers' beliefs are influenced by daily interactions within their individual microsystems (e.g., family, school, work), as well as cultural values and social norms of the relevant macrosystem. Additionally, Lee and Dallman (2008) emphasize sociocultural influences on the constructions of beliefs and knowledge. Again, this highlights the experiential nature of belief formation; teachers' personal, educational, and professional experiences shape their perceptions of children and families from diverse backgrounds, as well as the most appropriate ways to educate diverse children.

Empirical work on teachers' beliefs supports these theoretical origins of beliefs. Several studies have found teachers' personal and professional experiences prior to higher education to be influential in the formation of their beliefs regarding diversity. For example, in interviews with approximately 200 ECCE in-service teachers, the teachers

expressed that personal and professional experiences with diverse individuals helped them feel more prepared to work with children and families from different cultural backgrounds (Bernhard et al., 1995). In in-depth interviews with three ECCE teachers, Lee and Dallman (2008) also noted that prior intercultural experiences had positive influences on teachers' beliefs regarding diversity. Other researchers studying pre-service teachers over the course of a semester have come to similar conclusions (Middleton, 2002; Milner, 2005). On the other hand, teachers' lack of experience with individuals from other cultural groups has been found to hinder their ability to perceive diverse children in a positive light (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Luykx, Cuevas, Lambert, & Lee, 2005). Specifically, in one study reviewed by Hollins and Guzman, teachers with little or no experience in diverse, urban schools reported that they would never teach in an urban school because of their perceptions that the children did not care about education. Other studies in the review demonstrated similar findings; teachers who had no previous personal or professional experience with diverse individuals allowed ethnic jokes in their classrooms, were uncomfortable discussing school issues with culturally and linguistically diverse parents, and rated diverse children as less intelligent and more likely to have behavior problems.

### **Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Practices**

As described earlier, the relationship between beliefs and actions is inherent in the definition of beliefs. Bandura (1989) theorized that just as beliefs are formed through social experiences, beliefs also work to shape thoughts, emotions, interactions, and

behavior. Therefore, it is not surprising that theory and research regarding this relationship have shown that teachers' beliefs create the framework through which teachers craft their practices including decision making, instructional planning, and teacher-child interactions (Charlesworth et al., 1993; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Hoy et al., 2006). In fact, Clark and Peterson posited that teachers' actions in the classroom primarily "make sense in relation to a personally held system of beliefs, values, and principles" (p. 287). This relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices makes understanding teachers' beliefs regarding diversity and how to work with children and families from diverse backgrounds an essential component to improving the practices of ECCE teachers.

Teachers' beliefs can also influence their expectations for student learning. In a content analysis of pre-service teachers' reflective writing, Kyles and Olafson (2008) found that teachers who had little or no previous multicultural experience often responded to diverse children by lessening their standards for children's academic success. As one teacher wrote, "I would prepare assignments for diverse students that meet the core requirements, but may not be as extensive as the others" (p. 512). Another teacher commented, "I do not want to dummy down a lesson for a few students. I would rather have the lower students [children of color] take longer with the assignments than not complete it at all." These statements and similar comments from others teachers in the group reflected a serious misunderstanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and how to change teaching strategies in response to the needs of each student (Luykx et al.,

2005). Instead, these teachers interpreted the need for cultural adjustments as diminished ability in diverse students.

Teachers' beliefs regarding diversity can also influence the ways in which teachers interact with families. In the Bernhard et al. (1995) study, teachers' perceptions of diversity were manifested in a lack of contact with families from diverse backgrounds. Teachers noted that they had minimal contact with approximately half of the families from diverse backgrounds (42%) as opposed to 29% minimal contact with White families. Moreover, teachers stated that parents' disinterest in classroom activities and resistance to engaging in the classroom were the reasons for less frequent and involved contact with families. However, when diverse families were interviewed, they reported feeling that teachers avoided discussing their children. Thus, teachers' beliefs about diverse families prohibited them from having meaningful relationships with children's families. The absence of relationship between children's home and school context can have a negative impact on children's experience of school (Baum & Swick, 2008).

Despite the studies noted above, there is some evidence that pre-service and in-service teachers who have positive beliefs regarding diversity are willing and able to make changes in their practices to incorporate the needs of diverse children into their classrooms (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Middleton, 2002; Milner, 2005). For instance, in a survey of 129 masters' students, Taylor and Sobel (2001) found that almost all of the teachers believed equity in education to be a right and that teachers' expectations of children, regardless of background, was important in helping children succeed. Additionally, in response to questions regarding their perceived abilities and skills, 83%

of teachers noted that they were able to reflect upon their own biases, 45% reported that they felt comfortable adapting their teaching for diverse students, and approximately 60% believed that they could construct a classroom environment in which various learning styles were accepted. Additionally, some of the teachers in Milner's course were also able to achieve change in their beliefs and practices. As one student noted, "I think my thinking has shifted.... I think that by using alternative teaching methods in my classroom that my students are learning more. I think that they are also learning more from each other.... They're seeing four or five different ways of looking at the same issue." (p. 779). More research is needed to understand what experiences help some teachers feel more prepared and hold more positive attitudes about engaging with children and families from culturally diverse backgrounds.

### **Teacher Preparation and Beliefs about Children from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds**

Recent efforts in research and pedagogical theory have centered on the best ways to prepare teachers to work with diverse children. However, the empirical literature shows mixed results of the effectiveness of changing teachers' perceptions of and/or practices with children from diverse backgrounds (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Some studies have shown positive growth in pre-service teachers. For instance, teachers' responses to questionnaires indicated that they were eager to learn more about diversity and how to incorporate culturally appropriate teaching strategies into their repertoire (Taylor & Sobel, 2001). An examination of masters' level teachers' reflective writing assignments

demonstrated that the majority of the teachers showed tremendous growth over the course of the two-year program (Kidd, Sanchez, & Thorp, 2008). Teachers graduated from the program with an awareness of their own biases, a deeper understanding of diverse families and children, and an ability to locate sources of oppression and privilege in ECCE. Another study of pre-service teachers' experiences in a semester-long diversity course showed that many teachers were able to reflect upon the cognitive dissonance brought about by course assignments and make changes to their existing belief systems (Middleton, 2002). An investigation of pre-service teachers' service learning experiences of tutoring linguistically diverse children demonstrated that teachers were able to understand children's experiences of learning new languages more fully (Szente, 2008). These newer understandings then influenced teachers' strategies needed to meet the needs of diverse children.

Other studies have reported similar changes in teachers' understandings and perceptions of multicultural education including: increased self-awareness, new understandings of prejudice and bias, and even rejection of prior racist beliefs (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Recchia, Beck, Esposito, & Tarrant, 2009). It is important to note that even small shifts in teachers' beliefs are meaningful. For example, in an effort to understand teachers' learning processes during a multicultural literacy course, Dooley (2008) found that teachers did experience changes in some beliefs, but not others. She suggested that teacher educators understand these shifts as "micro-transformations", and that teachers may be able to change beliefs regarding some components of multicultural

education quickly, but may need more time and support for change to occur in other beliefs.

Nevertheless, research has also demonstrated that some courses and teacher preparation efforts are not successful in creating change in teachers' beliefs. Specifically, Lee, Lukyx, Buston, and Shaver (2007) found that although in-service teachers enrolled in a series of diversity workshops perceived cultural and linguistic issues as important in the classroom, there was little change in teachers' knowledge of how diversity in culture and language influence classroom practices. Further, when observed by the researchers, the teachers hardly ever used culturally relevant teaching strategies or materials in their classrooms. Although some teachers in the courses taught by Milner (2005) and Middleton (2002) were able to change prejudiced beliefs, there were other teachers that did not demonstrate the same kind of growth. These teachers still struggled to see the relevance of culture or ethnicity to learning; as one respondent noted, "I think we should treat people as equals and not highlight their differences by interjecting culture in every aspect of education. Keep race, gender, and other differences out of learning areas" (Middleton, p. 347). Likewise, Milner noted that teachers who were interning in predominantly White schools were not always convinced that diversity was a "big deal" (p. 776). Finally, Kyles and Olafson (2008) noted that many of the pre-service teachers in their study had difficulty moving past a surface understanding of multicultural education to an actual change in their beliefs. The authors also stated that some teachers were not able to express a commitment to including diversity issues in future teaching.



## **Teachers' Knowledge**

Scholars have described and researched a wide variety of components that comprise the construct of teachers' knowledge (Carter, 1990; Munby et al., Russell, & Martin, 2001; Shulman, 1986; Verloop, et al., 2001). Most frequently, however, these components are divided into three primary areas: content or subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and contextual or practical knowledge (Munby et al.; Shulman). Content knowledge consists of teachers' knowledge of specific pieces of subject matter (i.e., for a reading teacher, understandings and awareness of how phonemes and syntax work would constitute content knowledge). Pedagogical knowledge refers to teachers' understandings of theories and techniques regarding how to teach. This can include cognitions of and perspectives on how to teach specific skills or subject matter (this is often labeled pedagogical content knowledge), as well as broader understandings of how students learn and what teaching techniques are effective in encouraging student learning (Carter; Shulman). Finally, contextual or practical knowledge is understood as knowledge of the unique elements of a learning situation and the practical and professional judgment teachers use to make decisions about what and how to teach based upon the circumstances (Munby et al.; Verloop et al.).

As implied in the definition of teacher knowledge, teachers' understandings and cognitions are connected inherently to teachers' beliefs and classroom practices (Cater, 1990; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992). Teachers' knowledge may help to shape and be shaped by their beliefs and practices (Verloop et al., 2001). For instance, teachers' knowledge regarding a specific pedagogical theory may influence what classroom

practices they believe are valuable. Additionally, teachers' beliefs may guide how teachers decide which components of knowledge are most helpful in specific learning situations. Personal experiences and investigations into pedagogical techniques may influence teachers' practical or contextual knowledge, as well as their beliefs and future practices (Munby et al., 2000; Verloop et al.). Given the interconnectedness of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices, it is essential that the construct of teachers' knowledge is included in the current study. It is important to note, however, that teachers use all types of knowledge or the full extent of their knowledge to guide their practice. Just as teachers can be consciously or unconsciously aware of their beliefs, teachers can also explicitly or implicitly choose not to act upon a specific piece of knowledge (Verloop et al.). Additionally, it is important to note that there may be multiple origins of teachers' knowledge including personal and educational experiences. This study will focus primarily on teachers' knowledge gained from educational experiences; however, teachers may also provide information regarding knowledge gained from other sources, such as professional interactions with children and families or understandings of culture gained from personal experience.

Although teachers' knowledge has been an important concept in research on teacher education for the past two decades, the majority of this research consists of investigating teachers' content knowledge of subject matter such as reading, math, or science (Barnett & Hodson, 2001; Cunningham, Zibulsky, & Callahan, 2009; McCutchen, Green, Abbott, & Sanders, 2009; Podhajski, Mather, Nathan, & Sammons, 2009; Schwarz, 2009). Other work on teachers' knowledge has focused specifically on how teachers themselves learn

and process information, or make decisions in the classroom (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Munby et al., 2001). Furthermore, there has been some work outlining the standards of teachers' knowledge in terms of what makes a competent teacher. For example, NAEYC has developed standards regarding what early childhood professionals should know and be able to implement (Hyson & Biggar, 2006). Other organizations such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) have also created and monitored professional standards for teachers and teacher education programs (Hyson & Biggar; NCATE, 2008). These organizations do use theoretical and empirical work regarding what teaching practices are associated with positive child and family outcomes to derive their standards. Nevertheless, many of these standards are based upon investigations of teacher quality and classroom practices, rather than specific components of teacher knowledge (Hyson & Biggar). Overall, there is still a dearth of literature on teachers' knowledge (content, pedagogical, or practical) regarding culture or culturally responsive teaching, especially within the field of early childhood care and education.

### **Limitations in Current Research**

The literature discussed above provides several insights into the problem of understanding the relationships among teachers' education, beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices as these constructs relate to working with children from culturally diverse backgrounds; nevertheless, there are still several limitations in this research. In particular, although there are many studies that demonstrate that teachers do not feel

prepared to work with diverse children, there are substantially fewer studies that investigate the nature of the relationships among teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and their classroom practices. Future work needs to include all three constructs to investigate how beliefs, knowledge, and practices may inform and shape one another. Additionally, though the research provides several important suggestions for teacher preparation programs, much of the research on incorporating diversity in teacher education is conducted in K-12 education or curriculum departments. Thus, more research is needed on ECCE teacher preparation programs in particular. There is also a lack of detailed information on the ECCE programs. Even the work that describes particular courses or assignments does not consistently include information on program demographics, details regarding course topics or evaluation, or descriptions of the departments' philosophical foundations (Early & Winton, 2001). Finally, much of the available research is cross-sectional or conducted over the course of one semester. Therefore, longitudinal work is needed to follow pre-service teachers throughout their programs and into their professional endeavors. Such research will provide useful information on what creates lasting change in teachers as they are learning to work with diverse populations.

As the United States becomes increasingly diverse, it is essential that ECCE teachers learn how to work with children from a variety of cultural backgrounds (Castro, 2010; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). This work must examine not only teachers' current beliefs, knowledge, and practices, but also investigate the educational experiences that shape the development of teachers' thought processes and classroom practices. Hopefully, as necessary changes are made in teacher preparation programs, the ECCE workforce will

be better able to meet the needs of all children and families, as well as encourage all humans to create a more just and equitable society (Cannella, 1997).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

Although there can often be great debate among qualitative and quantitative researchers regarding the ontological and epistemological positions that guide their work, many scholars are beginning to find merit in mixing these methodologies to create more comprehensive and coherent studies (Todd, Nerlich, & McKeown, 2004). In fact, Todd and colleagues describe ten reasons or ways that researchers might benefit from applying mixed methods to their work. Examples of these reasons include: a) using one particular method as a pilot to use for another method in the same study such as using a quantitative survey to inform qualitative interviews, b) using the tension and discrepancies between the types of methods and results they provide to evaluate and strengthen theory, or c) using the different methods to understand the same phenomenon at varying levels so findings have both breadth and depth. Other scholars discuss the importance of selecting methods that align with the researcher's conceptual framework and research questions. When methods and questions do not match, it is difficult to uncover results that accurately reflect the participants or phenomenon of interest (Maxwell, 2005; Murraray, 2003). Further, the use of multiple methods also helps to prevent mono-method bias in which the data gained from a particular method may be influenced more by the data collection method than by the variability among participants (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002; Todd et al., 2004).

In the current study, the use of mixed methods was based upon the assumption that the quantitative and qualitative methods provide different ways of exploring and understanding the same phenomenon (Todd et al., 2004). As noted earlier, the primary purpose of this study was to investigate early childhood teachers' preparation for, perspectives on, and practices with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. The use of both types of methods provided rich, in-depth information about the relationships among these constructs at a variety of levels. For instance, the quantitative data resulted in information about teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices that allowed for more generalized conclusions about these relationships (e.g., the proportion of teachers who have negative or simplistic beliefs about cultural diversity or how these beliefs predict classroom practices). Correspondingly, the qualitative portion of the study offered an avenue for understanding of specific teachers' experiences, beliefs, and practices, in addition to their perceptions on how these concepts are related. Such knowledge helped to create a more complete picture of teachers' preparatory experiences.

In line with Maxwell (2005) and Thomas (2003), the selection of particular methods for this study also reflected the current research questions and conceptual framework. Specifically, the questions about classroom practices may be measured more accurately through observation or teacher report, whereas questions regarding teachers' experiences in higher education and how those experiences have shaped their teaching may be answered best through interview. Further, the use of qualitative methods reflected the study's feminist and critical theoretical framework by allowing participants' voices and perspectives to be an integral part of the research. Overall, the use of mixed methods in

this study helped to enrich our knowledge of teachers' preparation for and work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds by providing multiple perspectives on this subject.

### **Research Questions**

Figure 1 demonstrates the conceptual framework guiding the research questions for this study. The specific research questions and hypotheses used were:

#### **Quantitative**

**Question 1.** How do teachers' reports of beliefs regarding and knowledge of children from culturally diverse backgrounds predict their observed classroom practices?

**Hypothesis 1.** There will be a relationship between teachers' beliefs related to children from culturally diverse backgrounds and their observed classroom practices. Most likely this relationship will be positive; teachers who report more positive beliefs and attitudes towards children from culturally diverse backgrounds will have higher quality classroom practices based upon their observed scores. Additionally, there will be a relationship between teachers' knowledge of cultural diversity (and the influence of culture on child development) and their classroom practices. Again, it is hypothesized that this will be a positive relationship; teachers' who have more knowledge regarding cultural diversity and how children's culture influences their development will have higher quality classroom practices based on their observed scores.



**Question 2.** How do teachers' reports of beliefs regarding and knowledge of children from culturally diverse backgrounds predict their self-reported adaptations to their daily practices to accommodate these children?

**Hypothesis 2.** There will be a positive relationship between teachers' beliefs and their reports of pedagogical adaptations for children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Teachers who report more positive beliefs and attitudes toward cultural diversity will also report more adaptation to their daily practices to accommodate children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Correspondingly, teachers who report having more knowledge of cultural diversity will also report more adaptation to their daily practices to accommodate children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

**Question 3.** Does the racial and linguistic composition of the children in the classroom in relation to the teacher moderate the relationship between teachers' beliefs and knowledge and their observed classroom practices or reported pedagogical adaptations?

**Hypothesis 3.** The racial and linguistic composition of children in the classroom (in relation to their teacher) will moderate the relationships among teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and their classroom practices (observed and reported). This hypothesis is exploratory as there is little work on the relationship of classroom racial or linguistic composition and teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices. Thus, the direction of this relationship is not hypothesized. It may be that the relationships between teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices are stronger for teachers who have classrooms with a higher percentage of racially or children from culturally diverse

backgrounds. Conversely, these relationships may be weaker for these teachers, and stronger for teachers who have lower percentage of children from culturally diverse backgrounds in their classrooms.

**Question 4.** How are teachers' reports of beliefs regarding and knowledge of children from culturally diverse backgrounds related?

**Hypothesis 4.** There will be a positive relationship between teachers' reported beliefs regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds and their reports of knowledge of culture and child development. Teachers who have more positive beliefs regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds will also have more knowledge of culture and how culture influences child development.

**Question 5.** How are teachers' reported pedagogical adaptations for children from culturally diverse backgrounds related to their observed classroom practices?

**Hypothesis 5.** The relationship between teachers' reports of pedagogical adaptations and their observed classroom practices will be positive. Teachers who report implementing pedagogical adaptations for children from culturally diverse backgrounds more frequently will be more likely to have higher quality classroom practices.

**Question 6.** How are teachers' level of education and years of experience related to their beliefs, knowledge, and reported practices in related to children from culturally diverse backgrounds?

**Hypothesis 6.** As seen in previous research relating teachers' education to classroom quality, teachers' level of education will be correlated positively with teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and reported practices. Teachers who have more education will have more

positive beliefs, knowledge, and report more culturally responsive practices. Although previous work regarding the relationship between teachers' experience and quality of classroom practices is mixed, it is possible that teachers who have more experience with children from different cultural backgrounds may have more positive beliefs, knowledge, and practices with these diverse children. Thus, it is hypothesized that teachers' experience and their beliefs, knowledge, and practices will be related positively.

### **Qualitative**

**Question 7.** What are teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices in relation to children from culturally diverse backgrounds?

**Question 8.** What were teachers' experiences regarding diversity in higher education?

- a) What was the context of these experiences?
- b) How have these educational experiences informed/shaped their beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices?

**Question 9.** Are there other experiences have teachers had with people from culturally diverse backgrounds?

- a) What are these experiences?
- b) How have these experiences informed their beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices and shaped them as teachers?

Although it is inappropriate to have specific hypotheses for the qualitative portion of this study, it is important to acknowledge my preconceptions and assumptions. Based upon previous literature, I am inclined to assume that teachers will express both positive

and negative beliefs about multicultural classrooms. Similarly, previous research suggests that teachers will demonstrate a wide range of knowledge and differing levels of cultural inclusion in their classroom practices. I also presume that teachers who have had positive experiences regarding diversity in their higher education courses will have more positive beliefs and in-depth understandings of culture and children from culturally diverse backgrounds, in addition to being able to adapt their classroom practices to these children. Possible contextual factors that might influence these experiences include the content included and teaching approaches used in their courses, as well as the cultural diversity of the faculty at their respective educational institutions. Moreover, teachers' descriptions of their experience may reveal certain teaching approaches that are particularly helpful or harmful in preparing teachers for children from culturally diverse backgrounds. The qualitative results may also highlight other personal and professional experiences that may have influenced their beliefs or shaped their knowledge and classroom practices.

### **Original Study**

The current study was an extension of a larger project conducted with the North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project and North Carolina's Division of Child Development, entitled "A Comparison of Quality Assessment Tools". Although the Quality Assessment Project has multiple goals, one of the primary goals was to pilot a variety of early childhood classroom observation measures that may better inform our current understanding of quality and quality assessment. Testing these new measures of

quality may help in creating an accountability system for North Carolina that better meets the diversity of the state's children, families, and child care programs. This study expanded upon the original research project by examining research questions that have not been addressed in previous analyses of these data. Specifically, this study investigated the relationship between the observed quality of teachers' classrooms on several different measures and the teachers' beliefs and attitudes related to cultural diversity. The qualitative component of the study was also an addition, as an examination of teachers' perspectives on and their preparation for working with children from culturally diverse backgrounds as such information was not included in the first project.

### **Full Sample from the Original Study**

In the Quality Assessment Project, child care programs were selected randomly from all of North Carolina's licensed programs serving children ages 0-12 or 2-12. Due to measurement and logistic considerations, programs were considered ineligible if they had self-contained classrooms, required a bilingual assessor, were a family child care home or public school, or had fewer than 35 total children enrolled. To recruit programs, the research team first sent postcards to all eligible programs informing them of the study. Within two weeks after the postcard was sent, a researcher called the program director and invited her or him to participate in the project. If the director agreed, one toddler, one preschool, and one school age classroom from the program were selected randomly. The lead teacher from each classroom became the teacher of interest who was observed on all of the measures and completed the various self-report questionnaires. Lead teachers also

completed questionnaires on randomly selected children from the selected toddler and preschool classrooms.

The programs that participated include a variety of centers across the state of North Carolina. Program ratings on the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) ranged from 1 to 5 stars. Specifically, the sample consists of 17 1-star, 13 2-star, 25 3-star, 22 4-star, and 24 5-star programs. There was also a range of auspice including for-profit, not-for-profit, Head Start, and religious sponsored. Public school programs were not included in the original study because they did not have toddler classrooms. Further, programs came from 40 of the 100 counties in North Carolina, including some of the most eastern and western counties, as well as urban cities and rural areas.

### **Response Rates from the Original Study**

There were 4,779 programs listed in the initial sampling frame from the Division of Child Development. Based on the eligibility requirements outlined above, 1,749 of these programs were considered ineligible, reducing the sampling frame to 3,030 programs. Of these programs, 2707 programs were never contacted due to disconnected numbers, providers not answering the phone, or scheduling of programs had ended. Of the 323 eligible programs that were called, 117 of these programs program agreed to participate in the research, giving a response rate of 36.2%. Sixteen of the 117 participating programs cancelled their scheduled observations, leaving a total sample of 101 child care programs (a participation rate of 31.3%). These 101 programs include a total of 247 teachers in the following classrooms: 96 toddler, 98 preschool, and 56 school-age classrooms.

### **Procedure for the Original Study**

In the Quality Assessment Project, classroom observations were scheduled after the teachers and classrooms were randomly selected. Observations took place over two days, within a two-week time span. On the first day, teachers were asked to consent to participation in the research project. After consent was obtained, teachers were observed using the following instruments: the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998), the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Extended (ECERS-E; Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2006), and the Comfort and Contentedness of Children in Child Care (C5; unpublished). During the observation, assessors maintained a detailed, running record of the classroom, routines, and activities; these notes were used to guide scoring for all three instruments. Following the observation, teachers were interviewed for 30-45 minutes in order that assessors could ask questions about activities that were not observed to complete their scoring of the ECERS-R and ECERS-E.

The second day consisted of observing teachers on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System – PreK (CLASS Pre-K; Pianta et al., 2008), and the Preschool Outdoor Environment Measurement Scale (POEMS; DeBoard, Hestenes, Moore, Cosco, & McGinnis, 2005). Again, the assessors took copious notes during the coding periods to inform their scoring of the measures. Following the observation, the assessors interviewed teachers for 10-15 minutes regarding their beliefs about outdoor play to finish scoring the POEMS. After the observations were complete, the assessors collected any other paperwork that was needed from the teachers. This paperwork included a classroom

roster and teacher information form that was used to gain demographic data on the children and teachers for the current study.

### **Current Study**

In the current study, some of the observational measures used in the larger study were utilized to assess the constructs of teacher-child interactions, instructional activities, classroom management, classroom materials and structure, and pedagogical adaptations. Specifically, the selected measures were the ECERS-R, ECERS-E, and CLASS Pre-K. Additionally, the current study used the preschool teachers who participated in the larger project as the sampling frame for potential participants. These teachers completed additional questionnaires on their beliefs and knowledge, and a portion of them participated in qualitative interviews.

### **Survey Data**

The quantitative portion of the study focused on understanding teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices, both observed and reported. The following describes the recruitment and data collection procedures for the quantitative data.

**Sample for survey measures.** For the current study, the sampling frame consisted of the 98 preschool teachers who participated in the original Quality Assessment Project. Out of these 98 teachers, 68 teachers were eligible for participation in the study as 20 teachers were either no longer employed at the center or had switched to teaching a



toddler classroom. Of the 68 teachers, 41 teachers completed surveys for a response rate of 60.3%.

Table 1 displays the descriptives regarding the teachers' professional characteristics from these 41 classrooms. Teachers' average education level was a 5.68, which translates to a 1 or 2 year community college degree. The majority of teachers earned their degrees since 2004, with a range of degree completion from 1994 to 2010. Teachers had an average of 12.62 years of experience working in early childhood.

Table 1

*Descriptives for teachers' professional characteristics from quantitative data*

|                            | <b>Mean (SD)</b> |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| Level of education         | 5.68 (2.27)      |
| Year degree earned         | 2004 (4.41)      |
| Years of experience in ECE | 12.62 (8.39)     |

Table 2 describes the means for teachers' and children's ethnicities. The sample of teachers is predominantly African American (43.9%) or European American (41.5%). Teachers of other ethnicities include: Native American (7.3%), Asian American (2.4%), and Hispanic/Latino (2.4%). However, there are 2.4% teachers who did not identify their ethnicity. The average age of the teachers was 41.6 years. All of the participating teachers were female.

Table 2

*Percentages for teacher and child ethnicities from quantitative data*

| <b>Ethnicity</b>                    | <b>Teachers</b> | <b>Children</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| African American                    | 43.9            | 29              |
| European American                   | 41.5            | 57.1            |
| Hispanic/Latino                     | 2.4             | 5.6             |
| Asian American                      | 2.4             | 1.2             |
| Native American                     | 7.3             | 0               |
| Other (biracial or other ethnicity) | 0               | 7.1             |
| Missing                             | 2.4             | 0               |

On average, there were 12.78 children enrolled in classroom. The average classroom included 29% African American children, 57.1% European American children, 5.6% Latino children, 1.2% Asian American children, 5.1% multiracial children, and 2% children from other ethnicities. There were no Native American children in any of the classrooms. It is important to note, however, that there were wide ranges in classroom composition. Ethnicity ranges were: 0% to 100% for African American children, 0% to 100% for European American children, 0% to 40% for Latino children, 0% to 28% for Asian American children, and 0% to 33% for biracial children or children of other ethnicities. Additionally, the number of children on subsidy ranged from 0 to 20, children with diagnosed disabilities ranged from 0 to 16, and children who are English Language Learners ranged from 0 to 6.

**Procedure for recruiting survey participants.** The survey recruitment process for the sample included the following steps: First, using the sampling frame of 98 preschool teachers, I sent a postcard to all teachers and their supervisors that described the study and indicated I would call them during the next week. Then, I called the preschool

teachers to inform them of the study and invited them to participate in the project. Once they agreed, I mailed them a packet of supplementary questionnaires regarding their beliefs about, knowledge of, and practices with diverse children. Again, this process resulted in a total sample of 41 lead teachers for the quantitative data.

**Survey data collection procedures.** After agreeing to participate via the telephone, participating teachers were sent a research packet that included an instructional letter, consent forms, a demographic questionnaire, and a combined survey on teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and pedagogical adaptations. The combined survey included questions from: the Teacher Multicultural Attitudes Survey (TMAS; Ponterotto, Baluch, Greig, & Rivera, 1998), the Crosswalks Assessment of Knowledge, Skills, and Instructional Strategies (CAKSKIS; Maude et al., 2010), and the Early Intervention and Early Childhood Self-Assessment Checklist (EIEC; Goode, 2002). Teachers completed the forms and survey and returned them using a stamped, pre-addressed envelope. If the packets were not returned within a month, the teachers received a follow-up call and postcard reminding them to complete and return the forms. Teachers who returned completed survey packets received \$10 gift cards.

### **Interview Data**

The interview portion of the study also investigated teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices; however, the interviews also involved questions regarding teachers' experiences that have shaped them. The following describes the participants for the qualitative part of the study, as well as recruitment and data collection procedures.

**Subsample for qualitative interviews.** For the interview portion of this study, 10 teachers out of the 41 teachers who completed the survey were selected to participate. For the procedures on how these teachers were selected, please see the recruitment process outlined below. Of these ten teachers, 6 were African American, 3 were European American, and 1 was Native American. Eight of the ten participants had an Associate's degree in early childhood education, one teacher had a Bachelor's in child development, and one teacher had an Associate's in Human Services, as well as some early childhood classes. These teachers received their degrees between 2004 and 2010; the mean year was 2006. The average amount of teaching experience among interview participants was 11.2 years. As in the larger sample, all of the teachers who participated in the interview were female. The average age of these teachers was 41.3 years.

Table 3 shows the ethnicities of the participating teachers and the children enrolled in their classrooms. On average, 23.9% of the children were African American, 60.3% were European American, 7% were Latino, 4.9% were biracial, and 3.7% were from another race or ethnic group. In these classrooms, there were no Asian American or Native American children. The average percentage of children in the classroom who had a different ethnicity than their teacher was 67.1%. Additionally, the number of children with disabilities in the classroom ranged from 0 to 2 children, the number of children who spoke English as their first language ranged from 3 to 18, and the number of children who were English Language Learners ranged from 0 to 2.

Table 3

*Teacher and child ethnicities from qualitative data\**

|            | Teacher Ethnicity | Child Ethnicity  |                   |        |             |       |
|------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------|-------------|-------|
|            |                   | African American | European American | Latino | Multiracial | Other |
| Teacher 2  | African American  | 10%              | 90%               | 0%     | 0%          | 0%    |
| Teacher 3  | African American  | 6.7%             | 86.7%             | 0%     | 6.7%        | 0%    |
| Teacher 7  | European American | 31.6%            | 52.6%             | 5.3%   | 10.5%       | 0%    |
| Teacher 12 | African American  | 40%              | 0%                | 40%    | 20%         | 0%    |
| Teacher 13 | European American | 0%               | 75%               | 12.5%  | 12.5%       | 0%    |
| Teacher 17 | African American  | 33.3%            | 66.7%             | 0%     | 0%          | 0%    |
| Teacher 23 | Native American   | 40%              | 60%               | 0%     | 0%          | 0%    |
| Teacher 24 | African American  | 40%              | 53.3%             | 0%     | 0%          | 6.7%  |
| Teacher 30 | European American | 12.5%            | 87.5%             | 0%     | 0%          | 0%    |
| Teacher 40 | African American  | 25%              | 31.3%             | 12.5%  | 0%          | 31.3% |

\* Teacher ethnicity describes the broad ethnic grouping by which interview participants identified themselves. Child ethnicities were categorized by the teacher and are presented in percentage of children in the classroom.

**Selection and recruitment of participants for the interviews.** Following completion of the surveys, the teachers who were eligible to participate in the interview portion were identified using the following eligibility requirements. First, due to the emphasis on teachers' educational experiences with children from culturally diverse backgrounds, only teachers who had completed a 2- or 4-year degree in early childhood education or a related field (e.g., elementary education, human services) were eligible for interview selection. Second, because teachers' multicultural preparation and beliefs have changed over the past few decades (Castro, 2010), only teachers who received their degree since the year 2000 were considered eligible to participate in the interview. Finally, the teachers' ethnicity and the cultural composition of the children in the classroom were considered. When possible, teachers teaching in the most ethnically diverse classrooms or who had many children in their classroom from a different ethnicity than the teacher were selected for the interview process. Based upon these criteria, a total of 13 teachers were considered eligible for participation (31.7% of survey sample).

In an effort to reduce my personal bias to teachers' responses in the interviews, the dissertation advisor selected the possible interview participants. Specifically, the selection process consisted of two primary steps. First, I created a chart including all eligible teachers who participated in the survey portion of the study. A total of 13 out of the 41 teachers who participated in the survey were eligible to participate in the interview portion. The chart listed teachers' ethnicities, the racial composition of the children in their classroom, their highest level of education, specialization in higher education, and

the year they earned their degree. The target sample size for the interview portion of the study was 10 teachers. Thus, in the second step, the dissertation advisor selected 10 teachers from these criteria in order to achieve a maximum variation sample that would reflect a variety of teachers and classrooms (Maxwell, 2005). One of the teachers selected did not want to participate due to personal reasons of a recent change in work duties and schedule. The dissertation advisor then selected another teacher in order to keep the sample size at 10 teachers. After selecting the teachers for the interview process, I contacted the teachers via phone to obtain consent and schedule the interview. When teachers agreed to participate, I scheduled an appointment (as described below) for the interview.

**Interview data collection procedures.** The following was the general procedure for all interviews. Once the completed surveys from all participating teachers were returned, 10 teachers were selected for participation in the interview portion of the study. Once the interview was scheduled I drove to the child care center and interviewed the teacher face-to-face for approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews began with brief introductions and informal conversations to gain rapport (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Spradley, 1980). As teachers felt comfortable, I asked teachers about their personal backgrounds, experiences regarding cultural diversity during their time in higher education, and reflections on their work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Teachers who completed the interview process received \$20 gift cards.

All interviews were audio recorded using a digital recorder and then transcribed.

**Phenomenology.** The methodology of phenomenology is grounded in the idea that examining a person's lived experience and the context of that experience provides a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2005; van Manen, 1984). Inherent in this approach, then, is an emphasis on people's perceptions of the world that are gained through their personal and interpersonal experiences. Additionally, phenomenology operates under the assumption that people and their experiences are situated within particular social, historical, and cultural contexts (Suransky, 1980). Therefore, the context of people's experiences must be taken into account to understand fully the essence of a particular phenomenon.

Additionally, the meanings of such experiences are constructed through language (Schram, 2006). Thus, this methodology requires that people's behaviors, perspectives, and meanings can only be understood through dialogue about their experience including both their description of the experience itself and the context surrounding that experience (Hultgren, 1989). The use of interview is important in creating such a dialogue that is used to construct understandings of participants' experiences (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

In accordance with phenomenology, the qualitative interviews were unstructured, open-ended conversations that allowed the participants to name and describe their lived experiences of higher education teacher preparation (Schram, 2006). Remaining open to teachers' various experiences and perceptions provided space for the interviews to capture the participants' experiences, as well as the contextual factors surrounding those experiences. Additionally, the use of dialogue in the interviews aligns with the phenomenological perspective of a dynamic, co-created knowledge about the essence of



teachers' experiences in higher education. Thus, rather than position myself as an uninterested, unbiased researcher, I engaged in unstructured conversation with the participants. Although I did have some questions prepared to help guide the interviews, I remained open to the topics or issues they wanted to discuss, answered questions from participants regarding my work or personal experiences, and reworded questions when a phrase was unclear (Creswell, 2007; Hultgren, 1989; Schram; Suransky, 1980; van Manen, 1984). Further, I acknowledged my biases throughout the interview process through journaling my thoughts and perceptions regarding participants' perspectives (Maxwell, 2005). These self-reflections and notes were compared to the interview transcripts and used in the analyses to ensure that my personal biases do not distort the participants' experiences and perspectives. Finally, after the interviews and analyses were conducted, I employed a member checking process in which teachers were asked specific questions regarding the themes to evaluate if these conclusions reflect their experiences. I contacted participants to invite them to check the data either via email or mail. If they suggested that the themes and evidence did not reflect their perspectives, I recorded these views and used them to guide further analyses of the data.

### **Instruments**

This section presents information on each of the measures used in the study including a description of the observational measures used in the original study, followed by a description of the survey measures and the interview protocol that are specific to the

current study. All of the internal consistencies for the observational and survey data are based upon the data from the current study.

### **Observational Measures from the Original Study**

The following observational measures were used to collect data regarding teachers' classroom practices in the original study.

**Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (Harms et al., 1998).** The ECERS-R is a widely known tool used in child care research and quality enhancement as a measure of the global quality of a classroom. In the measure there are 43 items within seven subscales: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language/Reasoning, Activities, Interactions, Program Structure, and Parents and Staff. Each item is scored from 1 (*inadequate*) to 7 (*excellent*). Assessors observe the classroom for 3-5 hours and watch a variety of activities such as meals, transitions, small and large group activities, children's free play, and outdoor play.

For the purposes of this study, the ECERS-R will be scored in two factors: Activities/Materials and Language/Interactions which include 16 of the 43 items (Cassidy, Hestenes, Hegde, Hestenes, & Mims, 2005). Items included in the Activities/Materials factor focus more on structural quality and include: 3. Furnishings for relaxation and comfort, 5. Space for privacy, 15. Books and pictures, 19. Fine motor, 20. Art, 22. Blocks, 24. Dramatic play, 25. Nature/science, and 26. Math/number. The Language/Interactions factor emphasizes aspects of process quality. These items are: 17. Using language to develop reasoning skills, 18. Informal use of language, 30. General

supervision of children, 31. Discipline, 32. Staff–child interactions, 33. Interactions among children, and 36. Group time.

The selection of these factors reflects the classroom practices of materials/classroom structure and teacher-child interactions identified in the conceptual definitions section. Rather than using the whole scale to capture a global picture of participating classrooms, these factors provide reliable information on these specific aspects of quality classroom practices (Cassidy et al., 2005). Based upon the previously collected data, Cronbach's alphas for the factors are: for Activities/Materials,  $\alpha = .837$  and for Language/Interactions,  $\alpha = .768$ . Cronbach's alpha for the total scale is .888.

**Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Extended (Sylva et al., 2006).** The ECERS-E was developed as an extension of the ECERS-R with a specific focus on curricular aspects of the preschool classroom. This scale consists 18 items divided into four subscales: literacy, math, science, and diversity. Observations occurred simultaneously with the ECERS-R for a 3-5 hour time span. Additionally, to complete their scoring assessors reviewed teachers' lesson plans and children's developmental portfolios when available. For this study, only the diversity subscale will be used as a measure of the teachers' inclusion of diverse materials and activities in the classroom. Items within the diversity subscale are "Planning for individual learning needs", "Gender equality and awareness", and "Race equality and awareness". Items are rated from a 1 (*inadequate*) to 7 (*excellent*). The score for the subscale was created by averaging the three diversity items. Cronbach's alpha for this subscale is .532. Cronbach's alpha for the total scale is .782. Because of the low internal consistency of the diversity subscale,

both the diversity subscale and the total scale scores were used in all analyses involving the observational tools.

**Classroom Assessment Scoring System – Pre-K (Pianta, et al., 2008).** The CLASS Pre-K is intended as a measure of process quality (i.e., the quality of teacher-child and peer interactions in preschool classrooms). This measure is separated into three domains: Emotional Support, Instructional Support, and Classroom Organization. Within in each domain there are 3-4 dimensions of quality interactions, each with specific indicators that serve as examples of those dimensions. For example, in the domain of Emotional Support, the dimensions include Positive Climate, Negative Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, and Regard for Student Perspective. Indicators of these dimensions include physical and verbal affection, warm tone of voice, social conversation, harsh voice or sarcasm (reverse coded), acknowledging children’s emotions, and encouragement of student talk, ideas, and movement. In Instructional Support, the dimensions are Concept Development, Quality of Feedback, and Language Modeling. Indicators of instructional support include engaging children in problem solving, connecting new knowledge to previous knowledge, asking questions to extend children’s thinking, having frequent conversations with children, and repeating and extending children’s language. Finally, Classroom Organization consists of Behavior Management, Productivity, and Instructional learning Formats. Within these dimensions, indicators include: providing a range of materials and activities to engage children, having activities ready for children, brief transitions, clear and appropriate expectations for children’s behavior, and effective positive guidance.

CLASS observations occurred over a two to three hour period broken into 30 minute cycles (20 minutes of observation and 10 minutes of scoring). Scores are given from a 1 to 7; 1 signifies that none of the indicators are present and 7 demonstrates that all are indicators are present. The scores for each domain and dimension were averaged across cycles to create a score for each dimension. Alphas for the CLASS Pre-K are: for Emotional Support,  $\alpha = .937$ ; for Classroom Organization,  $\alpha = .919$ ; and for Instructional Support,  $\alpha = .887$ .

### **Survey Measures for the Current Study**

The following measures were adapted and combined into one survey that was used for data collection in the current study. The adaptations for each survey including removing the items which were not relevant to the current set of research questions (e.g., questions emphasizing linguistic rather than cultural diversity), as well as changing some of the survey language to make the questions more applicable to the participants. An example of this kind of adaptation is changing the word “student” to “children” to reflect language more commonly used with early childhood education professionals.

**Teacher Multicultural Attitudes Survey (TMAS; Ponterotto et al., 1998).** The TMAS is a 20-item self-report measure of teachers’ attitudes and awareness of multicultural issues in education. Teachers rate themselves on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Examples of items are “I can learn a great deal from students with culturally different backgrounds” and “Teachers have the responsibility to be aware of their students’ cultural backgrounds”. Items that reflect negative attitudes to multicultural education were reverse coded, and all items were

averaged to create a composite score. Higher scores indicate more awareness and openness to multicultural issues in education, as well as more positive attitudes toward cultural diversity. Cronbach's alpha for the original instrument is .86 and the scale has demonstrated test-retest reliability and criterion validity (Ponterotto, Mendelsohn, & Belizaire, 2003). For the current study, this survey was shortened to 17 items; the three items removed more directly related to linguistic rather than cultural differences in children. The alpha for the adapted scale was .923.

**Crosswalks Assessment of Knowledge, Skills, and Instructional Strategies (CAKSkIS; Maude et al., 2010).** The CAKSkIS is a self-report instrument in which teachers rate their general knowledge about child development, teaching skills, and instructional strategies in relation to culturally and linguistically diverse children and families. The survey contains 45 items rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*low*) to 5 (*high*): 21 knowledge items, 12 skills items, and 12 instructional strategies items. Examples of items include: “knowledge of the important role language and culture hold for children and families” and “knowledge of non-discriminatory assessment practices and tools”. Averaging all items created the overall score; higher scores indicate more knowledge in relation to diverse children and families. The adapted survey for the current study included only items from the “knowledge” subscale as this most closely related to the construct of teacher knowledge. Additionally, the number of items was reduced to 12 total items, again reflecting the knowledge most relevant to the current constructs and research questions. Cronbach's alpha for this survey was .931.

**Early Intervention and Early Childhood Checklist (EIEC Checklist; Goode, 2002).** The EIEC Checklist is a self-report instrument in which teachers rate themselves on how frequently they adapt their physical environment, materials, and resources, as well as their communication styles according to the children in their classrooms. Additionally, it asks teachers to rate how frequently they are aware of how their values and attitudes impact their teaching and interactions with children and families. The ratings for these items range from 1 (*Never*) to 6 (*Daily*). Examples of items include: “I read a variety of books exposing children in my early childhood program or setting to various life experiences of cultures and ethnic groups other than their own”, “I use visual aids, gestures, and physical prompts in my interactions with children who have limited English proficiency”, or “I understand that traditional approaches to disciplining children are influenced by culture”. The original 49 items for this survey were reduced to 20 items on the combined survey. Again, the items mostly closely related to linguistic rather than cultural diversity were deleted from the longer survey. An overall score was calculated by summing all items; higher scores reflected more frequent adaptations in classrooms. Cronbach’s alpha on the returned surveys was .857.

### **Interview Protocol**

The following describes the interview protocol for the current study. The list of potential questions and probes for the interviews is located in Appendix A. There were general questions and probes that helped to guide the conversation; however, the overall flow of the interview and the specific probes used were determined by the participant’s experiences and willingness to talk (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005;

Spradley, 1980; van Manen, 1984). For instance, some participants were more vocal and comfortable discussing their experiences with diversity in higher education. On the other hand, some participants were less vocal and needed more structure to talk through their experiences. Therefore, it was sometimes appropriate to use concrete examples and questions to help the participants think about their experiences.

Prior to interviewing the participants for the current study, I piloted the interview process to refine the questions and overall interview protocol. This pilot process consisted of identifying and contacting teachers who were similar to the participants of the original study from the NCRLAP recently assessed centers. From the NCRLAP database, I selected five preschool teachers based on their ethnicity, the ethnic composition of children in their classroom, their level of education, and year they earned their highest degree. I interviewed the first two teachers who agreed to participate in the pilot. I also interviewed teachers from the university child care program. Based upon these interviews and discussions with committee members and colleagues, I refined the interview protocol in terms of interview questions, time, and rapport gaining strategies. Due to the significant revisions of the interview questions, I repeated the pilot process with two other teachers to ensure the interview questions were easily understood and relevant to the overall research constructs and questions.

### **Training and Reliability**

The following outlines the training and reliability procedures for both the original and current studies.



**Observational measures used in the original study.** Full-time assessors for the North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project conducted all observations. Training for all of the scales included video and practice classroom observations. When possible, the authors of the scales led the initial trainings and served to check initial reliability. Prior to the actual research observations, assessors were required to achieve the following reliability scores: For the ECERS-R and ECERS-E, assessors had to achieve consensus scoring within one point for 85% of the scale items. The CLASS Pre-K required an 80% agreement on scoring within one point for each dimension. Reliability was maintained through group checks after 1/3 and 2/3 of the research observations had been completed.

**Interview process in current study.** For the qualitative data, training consisted of the pilot process described above. Additionally, Creswell (2007) noted that reliability can be maintained in qualitative interviews through careful transcription and notes of interviews, as well as having multiple coders during analysis. Because I was responsible for all coding, I did not have multiple coders to analyze the data. However, I did use notes taken during the interviews as a reliability check for the transcription. I also listened to all audio recordings while reading the transcriptions to ensure that all interview data was recorded correctly. Finally, I also employed a peer debriefing process in which dissertation committee members reviewed the interviews and codes or themes. This process consisted of sharing preliminary themes with committee members to review. During this review process, committee members asked questions about the reading and coding of transcripts, as well as the relationships among the preliminary themes. In this discussion, committee members provided advice on how to create individual themes

and organize group themes to reflect the participants and the context of their experiences. Following this discussion, I created an outline regarding the presentation of these specific themes. Committee members reviewed the outline twice to finalize the results that are presented below.

### **Data Analysis**

Both quantitative and qualitative data analyses were conducted to answer the research questions for this study. The analytic procedures are separated into quantitative and qualitative data and discussed in relation to the relevant research questions.

#### **Quantitative Preliminary Analyses**

Prior to conducting analyses concerning my specific research questions, I examined the data to understand the nature of missing data. Only 1 to 2 responses were missing for 3 items on the beliefs survey and 3 items on the practices survey. Zero responses were missing for the knowledge survey. These items were missing at random without a systematic reason. There was one exception to this analysis of missing data; one item dealing with the inclusion of cultural kinds of foods was missing from 5 participants' surveys. However, each of these participants marked the response as "not applicable" due to center policies about including food in classroom activities. Because it would not be appropriate to substitute or impute data for the responses, the composite for reported practices does not include this item for 5 participants.

Additional preliminary analyses for all quantitative data included checking frequencies, descriptives, and distributions for all variables and instruments, as well as testing for correlations among the specific independent and dependent variables. I also tested for correlations among demographic characteristics such as teacher race to determine if there are variables that should function as controls in further analyses. SPSS was used to conduct all quantitative analyses.

**Question 1.** How do teachers' reports of beliefs regarding and knowledge of children from culturally diverse backgrounds predict their observed classroom practices?

Composite scores were created and used to predict total scale, factor, or dimension scores on the various observation measures (ECERS-R, ECERS-E, and CLASS Pre-K). Using multiple regression, I tested for the unique and conditional effects of each of the teachers' characteristics on their observed classroom practices, as well as the amount of variance explained by each construct.

**Question 2.** How do teachers' reports of beliefs regarding and knowledge of culturally diverse children predict their self-reported adaptations to their daily practices to accommodate children from culturally diverse backgrounds?

As in Question 1, I used univariate regression to analyze which of the independent variables predicted teachers' reported practices.

**Question 3.** Does the racial and linguistic composition of the children in the classroom in relation to the teacher moderate the relationship between teachers' beliefs and knowledge and their observed classroom practices or reported pedagogical adaptations?

For each of the significant regression equations, I tested for moderating effects based upon class racial and class linguistic compositions. Racial compositions were calculated in two ways: 1) the percentage of children in each class who are of a different ethnicity than the teacher, and 2) the percentage of children in each ethnic group represented in the classroom. Linguistic composition was calculated as the percentage of children who were identified as English Language Learners. To test for moderation using multiple regression, I first centered the predictor variables and created an interaction term using each of the predictors and the specific moderator. When all of the variables were created, I entered the interaction term as a predictor in the regression equation. If the moderating effect was not significant, I then entered the original predictor to determine main effects.

**Question 4.** How are teachers' reports of beliefs regarding and knowledge of children from culturally diverse backgrounds related?

**Question 5.** How are teachers' reported pedagogical adaptations for children from culturally diverse backgrounds related to their observed classroom practices?

**Question 6.** How are teachers' level of education and years of experience related to their beliefs, knowledge, and reported practices regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds?

To address the fourth, fifth, and sixth research questions, I tested the significance of the correlations between the constructs.

## **Qualitative Analyses**

The overall process for analyzing the qualitative data was the same for each research question. However, during the classification phase (discussed below) the codes and themes were grouped according to which research question they addressed.

**Question 7.** What were teachers' experiences regarding diversity in higher education?

**Question 8.** Are there other experiences have teachers had with people from culturally diverse backgrounds?

**Question 9.** What are teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds?

The qualitative analyses began with transcribing all of the interviews and reading through the transcriptions multiple times. During the first reading of the transcriptions, I listened to the interviews to ensure that I noted any meaningful pauses, changes in tone, or other important aspects of the interview that were missed during transcription (Creswell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1984). At this time, I also created summary paragraphs for each interview to help organize the data and serve as a reminder of the interview's main points (Creswell, 2007). After reading and listening to gain a general sense of the interviews and the participants' experiences, I began the coding process. It is important to note that the coding process should not be conceived as a linear process. Rather, it is more useful to think of this process as a spiral in which the researcher engages in continual evaluation of the codes as compared with the data (Creswell, 2007).

It is important to note that throughout the coding process, I examined the data for themes both unique to individuals and collective across the teachers.

The first step of the coding process was to start with descriptive codes using short statements to describe portions of the transcripts that were meaningful in answering the research question (Miles & Huberman, 1984). When possible it was important to use “in vivo codes” (Creswell, 2005, p. 238) to express the participants’ actual words. Further, in phenomenological research, this phase of coding also included noting “significant statements” (p. 159), which consist of specific responses from participants that provide important descriptions of their experiences (Creswell, 2007). After listing all possible significant statements and descriptive codes, the second step of coding was to classify these statements and codes. During the classification phase, I grouped codes and statements into themes based upon similar meanings or insights into the phenomenon of participants’ experiences (Creswell). As noted earlier, I constantly compared the codes with the transcriptions to ensure that the grouped codes remain reflective of the data.

The final phase of coding was interpretation in which I used the grouped codes and transcripts to find the patterns or themes among the data. Using these patterns, I developed a “textural description” (Creswell, 2007, p. 159) of the participants’ experiences, which describes the experience through the themes and voices of the participants. Simultaneously, I created a “structural description” (Creswell, p. 159) to help describe the context surrounding the experience.

Although the primary goal of this phase was to find themes that are reflective of most of the participants’ voices, I used negative case analysis to understand unique voices that

went against the majority of the group. Negative case analysis also indicated places in which I need to revise my codes due to a misrepresentation of the data. To complete the interpretation phase, I used the themes, descriptions, and participants' voices (both unique and collective) to develop a coherent description of the "essence" (Creswell, p. 159) of the phenomenon itself.

During the qualitative analytic process, I utilized "peer debriefing" (Creswell, p. 208), and member checking strategies as other interpretive safeguards. The peer debriefing consisted of having colleagues review the themes and supporting evidence to ensure that alternative interpretations were not overlooked. Additionally, peer debriefing allowed for another way to limit researcher bias in interpretations.

## CHAPTER IV

### QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

#### **Statistical Results**

The purpose of the quantitative portion of the study was to understand the relationships among teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices, both observed and reported. The results of the surveys and classroom observations provide important insight into teachers' beliefs and knowledge regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds, as well as how these characteristics predict their practices. The implications of these results are also discussed below.

Table 4 contains the ranges, means, and standard deviations for the survey and observational tools from the survey participants in the current study. For observed practices, the ranges and average scores on these measures were similar to those found for all preschool classrooms in the original study (see Table 5 for the descriptives of the observational tools from the original study). Thus, the classrooms in the current study were of a similar range of classroom quality as those in the original study. Other quantitative findings are presented below by research question.



Table 4

*Descriptives for survey and observation measures (current study)*

|                                | <b>Minimum</b> | <b>Maximum</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>Possible Range</b> |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| ECERS-R                        | 3.40           | 6.12           | 4.73        | .650      | 1-7                   |
| Materials/Activities           | 2.00           | 6.33           | 4.62        | .973      | 1-7                   |
| Language/Interaction           | 3.29           | 6.57           | 5.02        | .875      | 1-7                   |
| ECERS-E                        | 2.13           | 4.33           | 2.81        | .547      | 1-7                   |
| CLASS<br>Emotional Support     | 3.25           | 6.69           | 5.33        | .876      | 1-7                   |
| CLASS<br>Classroom Org.        | 1.92           | 6.25           | 4.54        | 1.05      | 1-7                   |
| CLASS<br>Instructional Support | 1.00           | 3.42           | 1.64        | .597      | 1-7                   |
| TMAS*                          | 1.71           | 5.00           | 4.06        | .632      | 1-5                   |
| CAKSkIS**                      | 2.08           | 5.00           | 3.56        | .747      | 1-5                   |
| EIEC Checklist***              | 3.57           | 6.00           | 5.00        | .583      | 1-6                   |

\* TMAS (Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey, Ponterotto et al., 1998)

\*\*CAKSkIS (Crosswalks Assessment of Knowledge, Skills, and Instructional Strategies, Maude et al., 2010)

\*\*\* EIEC Checklist (Early Intervention and Early Childhood Checklist, Goode, 2002)

Table 5

*Descriptives for observation measures from original study*

|                                | <b>Minimum</b> | <b>Maximum</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>Possible<br/>Range</b> |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| ECERS-R                        | 3.07           | 6.12           | 4.65        | .718      | 1-7                       |
| Materials/Activities           | 1.89           | 6.33           | 4.49        | 1.09      | 1-7                       |
| Language/Interaction           | 1.71           | 6.71           | 4.94        | 1.07      | 1-7                       |
| ECERS-E                        | 1.73           | 4.33           | 2.81        | .533      | 1-7                       |
| CLASS<br>Emotional Support     | 2.62           | 6.69           | 5.32        | .868      | 1-7                       |
| CLASS<br>Classroom Org.        | 1.75           | 6.25           | 4.45        | 1.01      | 1-7                       |
| CLASS<br>Instructional Support | 1.00           | 3.42           | 1.64        | .561      | 1-7                       |

### **Question 1**

How do teachers' reports of beliefs regarding and knowledge of children from culturally diverse backgrounds predict their observed classroom practices?

It was hypothesized that teachers' beliefs and knowledge regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds would be related positively to their observed classroom practices. Based upon correlation and regression analyses, neither teachers' beliefs nor their reports of knowledge significantly predicted any of the measures of teachers' observed practices. There were no detectable relationships among these constructs. Table 6 displays the regression coefficients for these results. Additionally, due to the number of regression equations conducted, a Bonferroni correction was made to reduce the Type 1

error rate that can be inflated when multiple analyses are conducted simultaneously. For this set of questions, the Bonferroni correction reduced alpha from .05 to .008. As none of the relationships were significant at the .05 level, this change in alpha does not affect the results or interpretation for this question.

Table 6

*Multiple regressions predicting observed practices*

|            | <b>ERS<br/>Factor1<br/>(Activities/<br/>Materials)</b> | <b>ERS<br/>Factor2<br/>(Language/<br/>Interaction)</b> | <b>ECERS-E</b> | <b>CLASS<br/>Emo.<br/>Sup.</b> | <b>CLASS<br/>Class.<br/>Org.</b> | <b>CLASS<br/>Inst. Sup.</b> |
|------------|--|--|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Predictors | $\beta$  | $\beta$  | $\beta$        | $\beta$                        | $\beta$                          | $\beta$                     |
| Beliefs    | .202   | -.058  | .180           | .314                           | .262                             | .227                        |
| Knowledge  | -.160  | -.223  | -.383          | -.363                          | -.341                            | -.270                       |

**Note:** This table displays all standardized beta coefficients for each of regressions conducted regarding Research Question 1. Each regression equation contained one measure of observed practices as the dependent variable and both teachers' beliefs and knowledge as the independent variables.

## Question 2

How do teachers' reports of beliefs regarding and knowledge of children from culturally diverse backgrounds predict their self-reported adaptations to their daily practices to accommodate these children?

As hypothesized, teachers' knowledge did predict teachers' reports of pedagogical adaptations for children from culturally diverse backgrounds ( $t = 2.078$ ,  $p = .044$ ); however, teachers' beliefs did not predict significantly teachers' reported practices ( $t = .837$ ,  $p = .408$ ). It is interesting to note that when both independent variables were entered into the regression equation, the effect of teachers' knowledge was lessened ( $t = 1.878$ ,  $p$

= .068). Additionally, teacher's knowledge accounted for 10% of the variance in teachers' reported practices. These results demonstrated that teachers' knowledge was predictive of teachers' reported practices, but the predictive value decreased when accounting for teachers' beliefs. Tables 7 and 8 report these findings. It is important to note that the Bonferroni correction for this set of questions would change the significance level to  $p = .017$ ; this decrease would mean that the relationship between teachers' knowledge and practices would no longer be significant. Thus, these results should be interpreted with caution and may need to be replicated with a larger sample.

Table 7

*Multiple regression predicting teachers' reported practices, beliefs and knowledge entered separately*

|                     | Unstandardized |      | Standardized | t     | Sig. |
|---------------------|----------------|------|--------------|-------|------|
|                     | <i>B</i>       | SE   | $\beta$      |       |      |
| Teachers' Beliefs   | .122           | .142 | .133         | .837  | .408 |
| Teachers' Knowledge | .264           | .119 | .316         | 2.078 | .044 |

Note: This table shows the results when teachers' beliefs and teachers' knowledge were entered as the only predictor of teachers' reported practices.

Table 8

*Multiple regression predicting teachers' reported practices, beliefs and knowledge entered simultaneously*

|                     | Unstandardized |      | Standardized | t     | Sig. |
|---------------------|----------------|------|--------------|-------|------|
|                     | <i>B</i>       | SE   | $\beta$      |       |      |
| Teachers' Beliefs   | -.040          | .166 | -.043        | -.240 | .812 |
| Teachers' Knowledge | .264           | .141 | .338         | 1.878 | .068 |

Note: This table shows the results when teachers' beliefs and knowledge were entered as predictors simultaneously.

### Question 3

Does the racial and linguistic composition of the children in the classroom in relate to the teacher moderate the relationship between teachers' beliefs and knowledge and their observed classroom practices or reported pedagogical adaptations?

As this hypothesis was exploratory, the direction of the moderating effect was not specified. However, it was expected that the racial and linguistic composition of the children would act as significant moderators in the relationships among teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices. The findings did not support these moderating effects. Nevertheless, there were main effects found for teachers' beliefs and the percentage of children in the classroom who were of a different race/ethnicity than the participating teacher.

The first relationship tested was the association between teachers' beliefs and knowledge regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds. In this analysis, the interaction term for teachers' beliefs and percentage of children from a different race was

not a significant predictor of practices ( $t = .522$ ,  $p = .584$ ); thus, there was no moderating effect. Both variables, however, demonstrated a main effect for teachers' knowledge: Teachers' beliefs ( $t = 3.499$ ,  $p = .01$ ) and percentage of children from a different race than their teacher ( $t = 2.632$ ,  $p = .012$ ) uniquely predicted teachers' knowledge. Together, the main effects accounted for 37.6% of the variance in teachers' knowledge. These results show that teachers who have more positive beliefs regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds have more knowledge regarding how to work in a multicultural classroom. Similarly, teachers who have higher percentages of children of different races report having more knowledge regarding working with a multicultural group of children. However, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and knowledge does not change based upon the percentage of children in the classroom who are of a different race than the teacher.

Similarly, there was no moderating effect on the relationships between teachers' knowledge and reported practices ( $t = -.567$ ,  $p = .574$ ). However, for this relationship, percentage of children from a different race was not a significant main effect ( $t = -1.727$ ,  $p = .093$ ). Teachers' knowledge was the only significant predictor of teachers' reported practices ( $t = 2.721$ ,  $p = .010$ ) accounting for 17.5% of the variance. Teachers who reported higher knowledge regarding how to teach in multicultural classrooms reported more adaptations for and inclusion of children's cultures in their classroom practices. The relationship between teachers' knowledge and classroom practices does not change based upon the percentage of children of a different race than the teacher. Table 9 contains the findings for these regressions and tests of moderation. The relationships for each of the

above regressions also held when racial composition was calculated as number of different races represented by the children in the classroom.

Table 9

*Multiple regressions testing moderation*

|                         | Unstandardized |      | Standardized | t      | Sig. |
|-------------------------|----------------|------|--------------|--------|------|
|                         | <i>B</i>       | SE   | $\beta$      |        |      |
| Model testing Beliefs   |                |      |              |        |      |
| Beliefs                 | .639           | .183 | .459         | 3.499  | .001 |
| Percentage different    | .767           | .291 | .345         | 2.632  | .012 |
| Beliefs X Percentage    | .109           | .198 | .089         | .552   | .584 |
| Model testing Knowledge |                |      |              |        |      |
| Knowledge               | .354           | .130 | .446         | 2.721  | .010 |
| Percentage different    | -.499          | .289 | -.283        | -1.727 | .093 |
| Knowledge X Percentage  | -.070          | .123 | -.092        | -.567  | .574 |

These findings suggest that the racial composition of the classroom does not have a moderating effect on the relationships between teachers' beliefs and knowledge, or their knowledge, and reported practices. Rather, the percentage of children of a different race than their teacher only acted as a main effect predicting teachers' knowledge. Thus, teachers' beliefs are related to their knowledge regardless of the racial composition of the classroom. However, on average, teachers' knowledge does increase when the percentage of children of different races increases.

In terms of the linguistic composition of the classroom, the regression equations were not run due to non-significant correlations between percentage of children who are English Language Learners and teachers' beliefs ( $r = .002$ ,  $p = .989$ ), knowledge ( $r = -$

.069,  $p = .620$ ), and reported practices ( $r = .073$ ,  $p = .650$ ). These non-significant relationships held even when classrooms with no English Language Learners were excluded from the analyses. The results showed the following relationships with percentage of children who are English Language Learners: teachers' beliefs ( $r = -.419$ ,  $p = .121$ ), teachers' knowledge ( $r = .350$ ,  $p = .201$ ), and teachers' reported practices ( $r = .486$ ,  $p = .066$ ). It is important to note, however, that there was a significant, negative correlation between teachers' beliefs and the percentage of children in the classroom who are Latino ( $r = -.350$ ,  $p = .025$ ). There were no significant relationships between teachers' beliefs or knowledge and any other specific ethnic group. Additionally, there were no significant relationships among teachers' knowledge and reported practices and the percentage of children from any ethnic group.

Finally, there are a few important considerations to note with this set of analyses. First, the Bonferroni correction for this set would be .0125; each of the relationships would still be significant with this correction. Further, the relationships among teachers' beliefs, knowledge, observed practices, and percentage of children from ethnic groups were not tested due to the lack of significance found in the regressions conducted for the first research question. .

#### **Question 4**

How are teachers' reports of beliefs regarding and knowledge of children from culturally diverse backgrounds related?

As hypothesized, there was a positive relationship between teachers' beliefs and knowledge regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Teachers who



reported more positive beliefs about multicultural education also reported having more knowledge on how to teach in multicultural classrooms ( $r = .520$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Table 10 reports all correlations among survey and observational tools, as well as teachers' education and experience.

### **Question 5**

How are teachers' reported pedagogical adaptations for children from culturally diverse backgrounds related to their observed classroom practices?

Contrary to the hypothesized relationship, there were no significant correlations among teachers' reported practices with children from culturally diverse backgrounds and their observed classroom practices on any of the quality assessment tools. The only significant relationships were among the observational tools themselves. Specifically, the correlations for teachers' reported practices and observed practices were as follows: ECERS-R Materials and Activities Factor ( $r = .006$ ); ECERS-R Language and Interactions Factor ( $r = .076$ ); ECERS-E ( $r = -.009$ ); CLASS Emotional Support ( $r = -.069$ ); CLASS Classroom Organization ( $r = .030$ ); and CLASS Instructional Support ( $r = -.033$ ). Again, Table 10 displays all of the correlation results.

### **Question 6**

How are teachers' level of education and years of experience related to their beliefs, knowledge, and reported practices in related to children from culturally diverse backgrounds?

Despite the hypothesized relationships, the correlations among teachers' beliefs, knowledge, reported practices and teachers' education and experience were not significant. Thus, teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and reported practices neither increase nor decrease in relation to teachers' education and experience. The correlations among teachers' beliefs, knowledge, reported practices, and education were .164, .188, and .188, respectively ( $p < .300$ ). In terms of the relationships among teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and years of teaching experience, the correlations were .059, .049, and .268, respectively ( $p < .800$  for beliefs and knowledge,  $p < .100$  for reported practices). However, similar to the original study, there were some significant relationships among teachers' education and observed practices. Specifically, teachers' education was related positively to CLASS Emotional Support ( $r = .334$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and CLASS Classroom Organization ( $r = .381$ ,  $p < .05$ ). There were no significant relationships with teachers' experience. Table 10 shows these results.

Table 10

*Correlations among surveys, observation measures, and teacher characteristics*

|                     | ERS<br>Factor1 | ERS<br>Factor2 | ECERSE | CLASS<br>Emo.Sup. | CLASS<br>Class.Org. | CLASS<br>Inst.Sup. | TMAS   | CAKSkIS | EIEC | Teacher<br>Ed. | Teacher<br>Exp. |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|--------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------|---------|------|----------------|-----------------|
| ERS Factor1         | -              |                |        |                   |                     |                    |        |         |      |                |                 |
| ERS<br>Factor 2     | .451*          | -              |        |                   |                     |                    |        |         |      |                |                 |
| ECERSE              | .274           | .382*          | -      |                   |                     |                    |        |         |      |                |                 |
| CLASS<br>Emo.Sup.   | .337*          | .490*          | .487*  | -                 |                     |                    |        |         |      |                |                 |
| CLASS<br>Class.Org. | .343*          | .484*          | .455*  | .944**            | -                   |                    |        |         |      |                |                 |
| CLASS<br>Inst.Sup.  | .298           | .488*          | .482*  | .515**            | .473*               | -                  |        |         |      |                |                 |
| TMAS                | .119           | -.174          | -.012  | .099              | .060                | .067               | -      |         |      |                |                 |
| CAKSkIS             | -.055          | -.253          | -.292  | -.176             | -.185               | -.135              | .520** | -       |      |                |                 |
| EIEC                | .006           | .076           | -.009  | -.069             | .030                | -.033              | .133   | .316*   | -    |                |                 |
| Teacher<br>Ed.      | .157           | .157           | .214   | .334*             | .381*               | .110               | .164   | .188    | .188 | -              |                 |
| Teacher<br>Exp.     | .231           | .013           | .001   | -.109             | -.146               | -.165              | .059   | .049    | .268 | -.220          | -               |

## **Discussion**

The following discussion outlines potential explanations for the findings presented above. In particular, this discussion will focus on the operationalization and conceptualization of measures regarding culturally relevant practices, potential biases against culturally diverse children, and implications for future research regarding teachers' preparation and work with children from different cultural backgrounds. Similar to the section on the quantitative findings, these explanations will be presented by order of research question.

### **Question 1**

How do teachers' reports of beliefs regarding and knowledge of children from culturally diverse backgrounds predict their observed classroom practices?

The results showed no relationship among teachers' beliefs or knowledge and their observed practices. There are a few possible explanations for this finding. First, teachers may not always be aware of their beliefs, nor how these beliefs may influence their daily actions in the classroom (Pajares, 1992). For instance, teachers' implicit or unarticulated theories of children from diverse cultural backgrounds may be more influential to their teaching than their intentional or reported thoughts on this group of children (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Further, the teachers may have provided socially desirable responses on the survey measure of beliefs; it is possible that the teachers did not want to appear racist or discriminating and reported more positive beliefs they truly hold and enact. Therefore, teachers may have beliefs that do not align with their practices, but they are unaware of

or unwilling to identify these distinctions (Castro, 2010). As seen in previous work on teachers' preparation regarding culturally diverse children, it is not common for teachers to discuss or evaluate their beliefs concerning multicultural children or education.

Teachers who are not supported through such reflection may then have a difficult time articulating their beliefs and putting them into practice (Castro; Hollins & Guzman).

The lack of significant relationships may also be a result of a narrow conceptualization of quality within current measures of classroom quality. Specifically, although the observational tools from the current study have been utilized widely in early childhood education research, none of the tools were designed to address culturally relevant teaching practices. Rather, these instruments were intended to assess various aspects of classroom practices such as classroom materials, curricular activities, and teacher-child interactions. Each of these scales are important tools for understanding various components of classroom quality; however, they do not and were not intended to capture teachers' understandings of or practices with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. This gap in tools to measure culturally relevant pedagogical practices demonstrates that such components of early childhood classrooms are not included in current definitions of quality (NAEYC, 2009). With increasing amounts of children from culturally diverse backgrounds being enrolled in early childhood settings, it is important for scholars and practitioners to include cultural responsiveness as an element of classroom quality (Hyson & Biggar, 2006). Along with a more comprehensive definition of quality, researchers should also work to create measures that can capture teachers' practices as they relate to children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Currently, there

are some scholars developing potential measures or self-assessment tools (NAEYC; Shivers & Sanders, 2010), but future research will be needed to pilot these instruments, as well as understand the relationships with teachers' beliefs and knowledge.

Finally, this finding may also be due to the difference between the data collection methods. In particular, there are several ways in which self-report and observational tools provide different information on the construct of interest. Self-report gains information directly from participants regarding their perception of a specific construct; in this study, teachers were asked to report their beliefs, knowledge, and practices in relation to multicultural classrooms. Data concerning the participants' perspectives and self-understandings are important in social science research, as this information provides insight into the unobservable thought processes of individuals (Creswell, 2005). For instance, teachers' beliefs and knowledge are individual traits that cannot be seen by an outside assessor (Clark & Peterson, 1986), and can be understood through survey or interview. However, the disadvantages to survey methods are: 1) participants' interpretation of questions may be dissimilar; 2) participants may think that a particular answer is desirable and thus, respond to the questions in a way that does not truly reflect their perception; and 3) there is no form of "direct evidence" (Creswell, p. 156) to corroborate participants' answers to questions.

Observational tools offer a different set of strengths and challenges. Specifically, observational tools can provide the researcher with information on participants' observable behavior. Because regularly occurring behavior may be more difficult for participants to falsify, data gained from observing the actions and statements of

participants may provide a clearer picture of participants' interactions within their environment. Therefore, this form of data collection is often viewed as more precise (Creswell, 2005). In this study, assessors were able to examine teachers' classroom practices using a variety of scales, thus capturing the different ways in which teachers' actually interact with young children. Nevertheless, the disadvantages to this method include the inability to capture participants' motivations that guide their behavior, as well as the possibility of an overlooked or misinterpreted behavior by the outside observer. However, the latter concern is often guarded against through adequate training and maintenance of inter-rater reliability with the observers.

In general, the differences in these methods and the kinds of constructs they measure may overshadow potential relationships among teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and observed practices. These relationships may be ascertained more accurately through teachers' self-report of practices or the use of observation measures that are directly related to teachers' work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

## **Question 2**

How do teachers' reports of beliefs regarding and knowledge of children from culturally diverse backgrounds predict their self-reported adaptations to their daily practices to accommodate these children?

The findings for this research question demonstrated that teachers' knowledge, but not their beliefs, were predictive of their reported classroom practices with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. As noted above, one explanation for the lack of relationship between beliefs and practices is that teachers' lack of awareness of their

beliefs, which may affect their ability to implement such practices in the classroom (Hoy et al., 2006; Pajares, 1992). When teachers are unable to identify their beliefs, or recognize where their beliefs may reflect a deficit model of diverse culture, they may not be able to act in culturally responsive ways in the classroom (Castro, 2010; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). It is also possible that teachers may have very positive beliefs regarding children from diverse cultural backgrounds, but may not have the knowledge, curricular resources, or support to put these beliefs into practice. In a review of studies regarding the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices, Hollins and Guzman (2005) noted that many teachers did not feel confident in working with diverse children, and even "preferred not to be placed in situations where they felt uncomfortable and inadequate" (p. 483). Other studies have shown that teachers experience a fear of discussing or dealing with issues of diversity for fear of offending someone (Bernhard et al., 1995; Gay & Howard, 2000).

Moreover, teachers are not always given full decision-making power or leadership regarding the curriculum or materials used in their classrooms (Whitebook, 1997); previous work has found that when teachers are given autonomy over their classrooms, they are better able to implement culturally responsive practices (Garcia, 1991). The teachers in this study may not be able to introduce activities from diverse cultures because they do not have access to the necessary materials or support from their program. For example, five teachers from the current study responded "not applicable" to the item regarding cultural foods in the classroom. Although it cannot be stated conclusively that all of these teachers were not allowed to bring in outside food into the classroom; one of



the teachers wrote on her survey that all meals and snacks were catered and other food was not permitted in the classroom. These teachers are not able to bring in or cook cultural foods, which was one of the primary ways that many teachers in the qualitative portion of the study tried to include diversity in their classroom. Unfortunately, understanding teachers' self-efficacy, decision-making abilities, or resources within their centers is beyond the scope of the current study. Future research should explore these constructs to see if this explains the variance in teachers' practices regarding children from diverse cultures.

Finally, the lack of relationship may be due to the way in which teachers' practices were measured. Although the EIEC Checklist does ask teachers to rate the frequency with which they include materials or activities from diverse cultures in their classrooms, many of the questions refer to "surface level" classroom practices, such as the provision of books, pictures, or music from different cultures. However, there are fewer items on this checklist that address adaptations in interactions with children or families from diverse cultures, and only one item that discusses how teachers handle cultural or racial conflict in the classroom. Therefore, the practices reported by teachers on this checklist may indicate some pedagogical adaptation for cultural diversity, but not in a frequent or in-depth manner. It is also important to note that many of the "surface level" practices assessed by the EIEC Checklist are also required in various indicators of the ECERS-R. Because the ECERS-R is used for rated-license assessments and funding decisions in North Carolina, teachers may be implementing such practices because they are required, rather than belief in or knowledge of the need for pedagogical adaptations.

Though teachers' beliefs were not related to their practices, the data show that teachers' knowledge regarding how to work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds was predictive of their reported practices. Thus, teachers who reported greater knowledge also reported more frequent implementation of practices that incorporated children's cultures into the classroom. Teachers may be better able or more willing to implement practices when they feel knowledgeable about how culture influences child development and how to gain information regarding children's cultures (Verloop et al., 2001). However, there is still only theoretical work to provide support for this explanation. Future research needs to explore teachers' knowledge regarding multicultural classrooms, including the origins of such knowledge, and how teachers use this knowledge to decide what practices to implement in their classrooms.

### **Question 3**

Does the racial and linguistic composition of the children in the classroom in relation to the teacher moderate the relationship between teachers' beliefs and knowledge and their observed classroom practices or reported pedagogical adaptations?

The results showed that racial and linguistic composition of the classroom did not function as moderators for either the relationship between teachers' beliefs and knowledge or the relationship between teachers' knowledge and practices. Thus, these relationships remained the same regardless of the percentage of children from a different race than the teacher or the percentage of children who spoke a different language than English. However, the percentage of children from a different race than the teacher did predict teachers' knowledge about how to work with children from diverse cultures. This

finding, alongside the negative correlation between teachers' beliefs and the percentage of Latino children in the classroom, suggests that racial composition of the classroom is still important in understanding teachers' work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds even though these relationships did not function as hypothesized. Instead of indicating moderating effects, the results demonstrated only main effects.

For instance, the results for these regressions also showed that teachers' beliefs were predictive of teachers' knowledge concerning multicultural education. As Bandura (1989) posited, individuals use their belief system to understand their experiences. Thus, the most plausible explanation for this is that teachers who do have more positive beliefs regarding children from diverse cultural backgrounds may be more active in seeking out opportunities to learn and understand about specific cultural practices or pedagogical strategies for working with these groups of children. These teachers may also be more open to incorporating new knowledge into their current understandings of working with young children. The percentage of children of a different race than the teacher was also identified as a predictor of teachers' knowledge. The most likely explanation is that as teachers work with more diverse children they experience more exposure to some of the children's cultural practices. This exposure may increase teachers' knowledge about children's cultures and how culture influences children's behavior and development, as well as their confidence in that knowledge. According to Dewey (1938), continued experience in similar situations, such as interpersonal interactions with children and families from diverse cultures, helps to build future knowledge.

In terms of the non-significance of the moderation effect, this may be due to the stability of teachers' beliefs in relation to the racial composition of the classroom. It may be that teachers' beliefs remain stable regardless of the percentage of children that are of a different race than them. According to theoretical and empirical work on beliefs, many scholars have found that beliefs are difficult to change, even in the face of experiences that contradict or challenge those beliefs. Changes may be especially difficult if individuals are unaware of, unable, or unwilling to articulate their beliefs (Pajares, 1992; Gay & Howard, 2000). Thus, teachers' knowledge may be increasing due to the composition of the children in the classroom or their current belief system, but teachers may not experience any shift in their beliefs or perspectives of cultural diversity.

The lack of both moderating and main effects for classroom's racial and linguistic composition on the relationship between teachers' beliefs and knowledge indicates, unfortunately, that teachers' practices do not seem to change based upon the children in the classroom. Although teachers' knowledge of specific children and their cultures may be increasing, there is an absence of pedagogical adaptation in the classroom. Based upon previous work, there are a few reasons that teachers may not be changing their practices. First, teachers may feel as if they are already including culture in the classroom, and do not see a need for change in their practices (Kyles & Olafson, 2008). Therefore, even if the racial and linguistic composition of their classrooms changes, the way teachers are incorporating culture into the classroom may not change. Second, as noted earlier, there may be confounding factors that would moderate the relationship between teachers' knowledge and practices. Constructs such as teacher self-efficacy in implementing

changes in practices or program resources and support, may capture the variance in these relationships better than the racial or linguistic composition of children in the classroom.

Unfortunately, there is little previous work to provide an explanation for the lack of a moderating effect for linguistic composition of the classrooms. One explanation may be that the percentage of children who speak languages other than English was skewed positively. Out of 41 classrooms, 26 of those classrooms had zero English language learners enrolled. When the classes without English Language Learners were excluded, the correlations were stronger, but still not significant, perhaps because of the small sample size. Therefore, it is difficult to determine how the children's languages affected teachers' characteristics or practices. It may be important in future research to focus specifically on classes that have children who are English language learners enrolled. Additionally, there is no information in this study concerning the languages that teachers, teaching assistants, or other co-workers may speak. It may be that teachers who are familiar with a language other than English or have co-workers who can translate are better able to communicate with young children and their families. To assess how linguistic composition is related to teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices, future research should explore the linguistic context of classrooms and centers, as well as include more specific questions regarding linguistic practices.

While conducting the analyses for this research question, there was a surprising and troubling result regarding children from Latino backgrounds. As the percentage of Latino children increased, teachers' beliefs regarding multicultural education became more negative. This finding was noted for the percentage of Latino children but not for the

percentage of children from other ethnic backgrounds, suggesting perhaps the teachers had a negative bias pertaining to only Latino children. Although this was not a primary research question for this study, it is important to discuss potential reasons behind this bias and implications for teacher preparation. One possible explanation is the current social and political context within both the state of North Carolina and the nation. Latino populations within North Carolina alone have increased by 574% in between 1990 and 2004 (Stuart, 2006). Such rapid changes in the population, combined with prevalent negative stereotypes of Latino people may fuel this bias. Some of these stereotypes include that Latinos provide cheap labor, have large families, and are unwilling to assimilate to the dominant culture's language and practices. Therefore, people outside of that population, especially those individuals who have been in the United States for longer periods of time, may see people from Latino backgrounds as encroaching upon their work and ways of life (Dovidio, Gluszek, John, Dittmann, & Lagunes, 2010). In fact, Dovidio and colleagues discuss the phenomenon of "civic nationalism" (p. 65) in which African and European Americans who were born in or have generational ties to America think of their civic identity as "American", and have negative perceptions of other people or groups fall outside of that category. Unfortunately, young children may be experiencing these stereotypes in their classrooms. Previous work has shown that this may lead to alienation and disengagement from school, which often leads to negative developmental outcomes such as poor academic achievement, increase drop-out rates, and a lack of steady, gainful employment (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Lee & Dallman, 2008). It is essential that future research investigates the reasons for this bias to find ways

to help teachers work through any potential biases and ensure welcoming classrooms for children from Latino backgrounds.

#### **Question 4**

How are teachers' reports of beliefs regarding and knowledge of children from culturally diverse backgrounds related?

There was a strong correlation between teachers' beliefs and knowledge regarding children from diverse cultural backgrounds. As discussed above, it is likely that teachers' with more positive beliefs about multicultural education are more willing to seek out information on diverse cultures and see this learning as important for their work. Nevertheless, there are two important considerations that need to be explored further. First, due to the cross-sectional study design, as well as the data analyses conducted, it cannot be concluded that increases in teachers' beliefs are causing increases in teachers' knowledge. Rather, it could be that as teachers become exposed to children of different cultures in their classroom and begin to learn strategies for working with diverse groups of children, they then begin to change their beliefs to become more accepting of a multicultural classroom. Theories regarding the origin of beliefs support the idea that teachers' beliefs are often shaped by daily experiences and knowledge (Bandura, 1989; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992). Future research should investigate further if the relationship between belief and knowledge is causal, and if so, which construct is the cause and which is the effect.

Second, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and knowledge, taken alongside the relationship between teachers' knowledge and practices, indicates that teachers'

knowledge may act as a mediating factor for the relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. This could not be tested with the current data because there was no significant relationship between teachers' beliefs and their reported practices; however, it is important to consider the idea that teachers' beliefs may impact their practices through their level of knowledge regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds. It may require a larger sample or a more appropriate measure of teachers' practices to assess this relationship.

### **Question 5**

How are teachers' reported pedagogical adaptations for children from culturally diverse backgrounds related to their observed classroom practices?

The findings for this question showed no relationship between teachers' reported practices and their observed practices. As stated in response to the findings concerning teachers' characteristics and observed classroom practices, the primary reason for this lack of relationship may be the difference in the constructs and measurement tools.

Although Shadish, Cook, and Campbell (2002) discuss the strengths of using multiple methods to assess a particular construct, it is important that the operationalizations of the measures are similar enough to capture the same construct (i.e., there is convergent validity among the measures). The EIEC Checklist was designed to capture the frequency of which teachers' implemented pedagogical changes in their classroom in response to children's cultural backgrounds, whereas the ECERS-R, CLASS, and ECERS-E were intended to assess other elements of classroom practices and quality such as materials, interactions, and curricular activities regardless of children's cultural backgrounds.



Again, this highlights the need for a tool or set of tools that can capture teachers' responses to children from diverse backgrounds (Hepburn, 2004; NAEYC, 2009).

### **Question 6**

How are teachers' level of education and years of experience related to their beliefs, knowledge, and reported practices in related to children from culturally diverse backgrounds?

Unfortunately, teachers' level of education and years of experience were not related to teachers' beliefs, knowledge, or reported practices and cannot help to explain the variability among these constructs. However, the non-significance of these relationships may provide support for recent arguments for more unified and comprehensive measures of teachers' education and experience (Bogard et al., 2008). Specifically, as several scholars have discussed, the content and quality of teachers' education and experience differs widely (Early & Winton, 2001; Maxwell, Feild et al., 2006; Tout et al., 2006; Saracho & Spodek, 2007). Therefore, the use of the highest level of education or the length of teachers' professional experience to measure such constructs is limited. As stated in the literature review, few teacher preparation programs have classes devoted to understanding and working with children from diverse cultures (Maxwell, Lim, et al., 2006), and only a few studies have explored what educational practices are most helpful for preparing early childhood teachers in this work (Dooley, 2008; Kidd et al., 2008; Middleton, 2002; Milner, 2005). Although some of this information will be discussed in the qualitative findings from the current study, there is still great need for future research to investigate the specific components of teacher education and experience.

Moreover, in this study, there is little to no information regarding the cultural composition of teachers' previous classrooms or what professional experiences they have had with culturally diverse children and families in those classrooms. As discussed earlier in relation to predictors of teachers' knowledge, it may be that as teachers have more professional experience with children from diverse backgrounds they may be more knowledgeable about working in a multicultural classroom. Additionally, the qualitative portion of this study will demonstrate that teachers often felt that their professional experiences were especially meaningful in preparing them to work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. These teachers also discussed personal experiences outside of the classroom as influential in shaping their beliefs and practices with young children from diverse cultures. Therefore, it is important that scholars continue to refine definitions and data collection methods that are better able to capture the specific personal, professional, and educational experiences of teachers and how these are influencing their work in a multicultural classroom. The qualitative work presented below will begin to unpack some of these important experiences for teachers' work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

## CHAPTER V

### QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

#### **Interview Results**

The interview component of the study provided a rich and complex picture of early childhood teachers and their work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Overall, teachers believed it was important to include all children in the classroom, even though this belief was articulated and implemented in a variety of ways. Teachers also shared about personal, professional, and educational experiences that have been important influences in their teaching. The teachers' individual stories are presented below, followed by a discussion of the themes across all of the participating teachers.

#### **Individual Stories**

There was a wide variety in the interview participants in terms of personal and professional experiences; these different experiences can be heard throughout their individual stories of how they perceive, learn about, and work with young children from culturally diverse backgrounds and their families.

#### **Candace**

Candace is a European American woman in her mid-forties who has been teaching for 10 years. She has always worked at the same small, rural center, but has taught both

infants and preschoolers. In these age groups, she has taught African American and European American children, although her personal experiences growing up down the street from a Latino family taught her that, “everybody’s the same no matter what color they are”. She was very proud to discuss recent accomplishment of graduating with her associate’s degree in ECE and identified herself as a “good student”.

**“A three year old is a three year old”.** For Candace, an important part of her teaching was the focus on children’s similarities, especially in terms of how children behave. She frequently discussed how children “all act the same no matter what their nationality is”. In fact, when she talked about the one African American child in her classroom, she noted that “they’re just kids, they are all the same...they still do the same stuff, they act the same way...nothing different [about the child] because he’s just like the other boys”. According to Candace, the primary reason behind these similarities was that children are too young to express differences in culture. She felt that, “when they are this age, I have three’s you know, they are all the same.” Because of these perceived similarities, Candace felt there was no need to make any adaptations to the classroom or her practices to incorporate children and families from different cultures.

Interestingly, there were a few instances in which Candace felt she needed to make changes to her classroom practices. However, these adaptations were not made due to cultural or linguistic differences. Specifically, the first example she discussed was a child who was being raised by grandparents and acted more “wild” in the classroom than the other children, and the second was the inclusion of children with disabilities in the classroom. In both of these instances, the teacher noted that she would simply take more

time to work one-on-one with these children during free play time “to help them catch up”. Most often, she stated that the individual activities were, “like dinosaurs or bears and we will do the colors and count them and stuff”.

Additionally, Candace did mention a few ways in which she would include culture in the classroom, though she expressed that these activities did not occur regularly. She noted that, “we had different meals from different cultures, Mexican, Chinese.... We haven’t done that in the last few years, but just to teach the kids the different foods and different cultural foods. And I think that’s good for them to learn all that stuff”. Candace also mentioned that if she did have a child from a different culture that she would “go to the library and get books...and learn more about their stuff...like the holidays”.

Although she did demonstrate some desire to learn more about children’s cultures and felt that it was important to get to know children individually, Candace did not indicate that children’s cultures or other individual characteristics were influential in what and how she decided to teach young children. The inclusion of different cultural foods was not in response to specific children’s cultures, and she had not yet incorporated information on different holidays into her curriculum. Thus, we see in Candace a tension between the belief that all children are the same, and that it could be important to acknowledge and include some differences in people around the world.

### **Tashina**

In her mid-twenties, Tashina is the youngest of all of the interview participants. She is African American, and grew up in a rural town near the Eastern coast of North Carolina. In total, she has three years of teaching experience: her first year was with school-age

children, and she has taught in the 3-year old classroom for the last two years. During her first two years teaching, she attended school and completed her associate's degree. Currently, the children in her classroom represent the ethnicities she has previously taught: African American, European American, Latino, and biracial. In her personal experiences, she only encountered European American and Latino individuals during school, but noted that she always had "positive interactions" with people from different cultures.

**"We treated them just like regular".** Growing up, Tashina discussed that she was taught to not "see color". Specifically she noted that, "[from] my parents and grandparents we didn't hear White or Spanish or anything like that, [we learned] they were just children, they were just people". From these experiences, Tashina has come to believe that "we're all one color", and it is this perspective that has been a major influence in her teaching. Thus, when there was a child in her classroom that was a Jehovah's Witness, she was able to "work with them just like they were regular people". In fact, she frequently expressed that the cultural beliefs and practices of this family were really no different from other families; statements such as, "they're no different from us, they just believe different", and "the only difference in them was the fact that you know we had to respect their belief in not celebrating the holidays" are evidence of this perspective.

Nevertheless, Tashina also discussed that she thought it was important to acknowledge children's differences. In her teaching, she thought that getting to know a child on an individual level was essential, "because you can deal with that child

different.... you have to deal with children as they are as their own personality”.

However, as evidenced by this statement, the primary differences in children that she discussed were personality differences. There was little recognition that other forms of difference might affect children’s behavior or interactions in the classroom. Moreover, Tashina expressed that it was important to have information on children’s backgrounds, but she felt that asking personal questions of the families was unprofessional.

Specifically, Tashina stated she would “look up information about what they believe, but...never ask them [the parents] personal questions about why they believe what they believe.” Similar to Candace, we see a tension in Tashina’s acknowledgement of children’s differences and her belief that children from diverse cultural backgrounds “are just like regular people”.

It is also important to note that Tashina included some aspects of language and culture in her classroom. For example, she noted that “during group time when I teach the children colors and numbers....I don’t only teach them and speak in English, I’ll do it in Spanish”. She was also proud of past activities she has included such as, “we listen to different kinds of music...music from China, music from Africa, or music from Australia, you know, anywhere overseas....[and] we did the Chinese New Year and we made a dragon for art”. Again, however, we see that this inclusion is not always a regular occurrence. Tashina confessed that she hadn’t “done it [focused on learning about a specific culture] in the past six months”.

What is most interesting in Tashina’s story is her reason for including language and culture in the classroom. She never mentioned that it was important for the children to

learn about different people or that children's culture should be reflected in the classroom. Instead, Tashina frequently expressed that the inclusion of culture was required as a part of her job. This perspective is seen in statements like: "we dealt with it [making changes in the classroom] because that's what we had to do", and "we're supposed to do that [include Spanish] all the time". Tashina did not say these statements in a negative tone or express unhappiness about having to include language and culture in the classroom, but she did feel that doing so was both a requirement in her program and an aspect of professionalism, "I have to do my job and be professional and deal with them just like I do everybody else".

### **Ramona**

Ramona is an African American woman in her late forties, and has been teaching in early childhood almost 20 years. She completed her associate's degree in early childhood education just a few years ago. Her professional experiences have included working in two centers on either end of the socioeconomic spectrum within the same large, North Carolina city. These two centers also varied in terms of children's ethnicities: the "under privileged" center primarily had African American and Latino children enrolled, whereas there is only one child of color in her current classroom at the "over privileged" center. Personally, motherhood and the connections among home, work, and school were meaningful experiences to this teacher. She expressed that "being a mommy" prepared her most to work with young children and was the catalyst that brought her into the early childhood education field.



**“After I set my philosophy in place, I just stand by it”.** From Ramona’s perspective, the purpose behind teaching is “feeding [children’s] needs”. She originally thought that children’s needs would differ based on socioeconomic status, yet when she switched jobs from the center with primarily low-income families to the center with more affluent families she found that “they all need the same thing”. Specifically, she expressed that, “they all need that attention, they need that one-on-one...they all need help with social skills...they need love, understanding, guidance. They need an opportunity to explore, be independent.” Because of this belief in the similarities in children’s needs, Ramona could approach her teaching by knowing her philosophy and sticking to that philosophy no matter the circumstances. As she noted, “my beliefs are strictly to help encourage and build up [the] children, so I stick, I stick by the gun”. This understanding especially guided how she approached the families in her classroom. From her perspective, “once you set your stage and you let the parents know exactly how you’re gonna work...keep it real with them, it just all falls into place”. She further stated that this attitude towards family interactions help her to resolve and even prevent conflicts with families.

Nevertheless, there was also a tension found in Ramona’s insistence on teaching all children the same way, and simultaneously acknowledging their individual differences in age and developmental level. As Ramona expressed, “I had to learn to be a teacher of ten kids at one time...even though this child is three, she could know what a three year old knows or a two year old knows. So I’m learning that we plan ten steps each day and it works”. As seen in the stories of other teachers, it seems to be important to teachers that

they acknowledge both the similarities and differences among young children. In terms of children's cultures, however, Ramona expressed that she did not need to make any adaptations to her classroom. She did state that she sometimes changed her guidance for children based upon family situation such as parents' frequent travel or differences in discipline practices between home and school, but these changes only included providing more frequent redirection for those children.

Throughout the interview, Ramona discussed how her personal experiences as a mother and her practical experience with her co-op teacher influenced these various elements of her teaching philosophy. As noted earlier, Ramona became a teacher after experiencing her own child's transition into preschool. She even had another child while going to school; "so [with] that last baby, I felt every part of child development there was to learn". For Ramona, the intersection between motherhood, school, and work, or her "early childhood experiences", helped her to know her philosophy or as she stated, "I can read it [my philosophy] up and down, and I know what each little word stands for". Moreover, it was in her co-op class that her mentor taught her that "all children need the same thing" and "how to flow through my day, giving kids what they need". For this teacher, her personal and professional experiences were paramount in helping her understand, connect to, and apply what she was learning in school. As she stated, "if I'm gonna learn, then I need to be able to use it".

### **Adele**

Adele was born outside of North Carolina, but moved to the outskirts of a large urban city as a teenager. She is European American and in her late forties. Adele has been

teaching for over 15 years, and worked to complete her associate's degree over the course of nine years. She graduated in the mid 2000's. During that time, she taught preschool in ECE at the same center where she is currently working. The children enrolled in her classroom have been primarily African American and European American, but she has taught Latino children and currently has one child from Central Africa in her classroom. Personally, this teacher expressed that she did not have a lot of experience with individuals from different cultures when growing up. She also felt that there were not cultural differences between African Americans and European Americans. As she stated, "other than Black and White we were pretty much all the same. There was not really a lot of Spanish, Hispanics in our neighborhood so it was really, diverse wise, it was just African American and White".

**"I just don't see them as diversity cause [they] spoke English."** From Adele's perspective, language seemed to be the primary marker of difference in people. She expressed that "everybody's just like me. I mean you might speak a different language, you might have an accent, but I mean we're all the same". When discussing her work with children from different backgrounds, Adele again noted that the only distinction among children was if they did or did not speak English fluently. In fact, she expressed that there was no real difference in her teaching, unless the child did not speak English. Her focus on language as the main indication of culture is striking, especially because she currently has a child from Central African enrolled in her class. However, from her point of view, "they [the child and family] speak such fluent English that I've, I guess I just don't see them as diversity cause everyone that I've worked with spoke English".

Further, Adele stated that she did not need to make any changes to her classroom practices for this child because “he’s just like any other one [child] in the room” and the child’s “parents never really talked about [their] cultural background”. She further noted that because these children from culturally diverse backgrounds were “pretty much staying with all the other children” on a developmental level, that there was no need for adaptations in her classroom.

Not only was language the main form of difference between children, but it was also the primary difficulty for Adele in her teaching due to her inability to speak another language. For example, she stated that, “I’ve had one girl come through that didn’t speak any English, which was hard for me because I didn’t speak no Spanish”. In reference to another Spanish speaking child, Adele remarked, “she’s been good, but when she came in she spoke English, but not very good, [but] her English is actually getting a little better”. Although Adele did have an assistant teacher who spoke Spanish, children who spoke a different language were identified as the only difference and only difficulty in Adele’s classroom.

Because of these difficulties, Adele saw her primary goal and reward in teaching as helping the children learn to speak English. She discussed one child who came into her with no knowledge of English: “It was a little harder, but it took me like six months to get her to speak English.... for her to come in and speak no English and for her to leave...and go to kindergarten and know how to speak English, I mean she wasn’t fluent, but she said her ABC’s and her colors and everything in English, so I mean it was a big reward for me”. Adele’s primary methods of teaching English to young children were to

repeat statements, go slower when explaining things, and use pictures or books to help describe classroom items. She also expressed that she could “go to the library and just get a dictionary type book with their language and just use a few words” if she had a child in the classroom who spoke neither English, nor Spanish. Additionally, Adele felt that parents were helpful in the children learning English because they wanted their children to be prepared for public schooling.

Although it was not a main focus of Adele’s individual story, it is also important to note that, Adele’s teaching seemed to exist in the tension between having the same goals for all children (e.g., “I don’t think there’s any difference than there is with any other child. If I know I’ve got that child ready for kindergarten... I mean it’s all the same”), and needing to understand children on an individual level (e.g., “you get to know how they do things and their reward system [at home].... Knowing their cultural background helps some too because we celebrate a lot of holidays they might not”). Thus, as seen in other teachers’ stories, Adele believed all children to be the same, but acknowledged there were some differences in children’s language, culture, and family practices. She also acknowledged that she “hadn’t really thought about it” and “it could be something I need to think about”, referring to ways in which she might need to include children’s culture in the classroom. Nevertheless, she felt unsure of how to begin this process and saw changes to her teaching as an obstacle, “it would be a challenge to change the lesson plan”. Within this tension then, Adele expressed a desire to learn more but felt there were barriers to her changing her teaching practices in terms of her own knowledge.

## **Charlene**

Charlene, an African American woman in her late 40's, was born and raised in a large city in North Carolina. She has held a variety of jobs including working in retail and for an airline before teaching young children. She now has 8 years of teaching experience, gained through working at two child care centers. She is the only interview participant with a Bachelor's degree in ECE, which she earned several years ago. Although most of the children she has taught over the years have been African American or European American, she did express that she occasionally has children from Southeast Asia or Latin America. She mentioned that her personal experience of growing up as the only child with glasses has helped her understand how to accept differences with individuals and "not think that everything you do is always the right way".

**"There's always room to learn more."** For Charlene, the presence of children from culturally diverse backgrounds in her classroom was an opportunity for her to continue learning. Throughout the interview, she noted that each new aspect of difference in the children was something from which both she and the other children could learn. For example, her response to having Latino children in her classroom was, "I knew just a little Spanish, but that made me want to learn more [of the language], and also to learn more about their culture". Moreover, when Charlene had children from Southeast Asia enroll in her classroom, she spoke with her co-worker from the same country and learned about one of their primary holidays: "She [the co-worker] was so excited that I wanted to know. She brought in different things and she told us how they did and what they represented and what they meant. And so I was able to do a unit on that [the holiday]....

It turned out to be a great experience for both [me and the children], for everybody actually.” Thus, Charlene’s overall response to her teaching was that “there’s always room to learn more”; she also expressed that if there was something she felt like she did not know, she would do research to learn about that particular subject.

This focus on learning extended to the families and children in the classroom as well. She noted that families were often “eager for their children to learn. They wanted them to learn *our* language, to learn *our* customs, to learn *our* traditions.” She even pointed out that some families “would say, ‘No, don’t try to speak Spanish, speak to them in English’”. Although she did note that language could be a barrier, Charlene felt this eagerness in the children and families helped her relate to the parents and overcome any challenges in working with the children.

As a result of her learning, Charlene discussed a few ways in which she brought children’s cultures into the classroom. Activities included learning about and celebrating different holidays, cooking and eating different foods, and using words and books from different languages. Interestingly, in her discussion of learning about children’s cultures and including them in the classroom, Charlene did not distinguish between African Americans and European Americans as having different cultures or customs. Rather she stated that they were “pretty much all American”. The only children she noted as having a different culture were those children from a different country or who spoke a different language. Additionally, while she did recognize that some children had different cultures, Charlene also emphasized to the children that “it’s all the same on the inside.... just because we don’t have the same color skin on the outside, we’re all the same”. The ways

she included culture and her perspective on what differences counted as diversity was similar to some of the other teachers. In these similarities, there is an indication that teachers are understanding culture on a superficial level.

### **Selena**

Selena is one of the youngest teachers who participated in the interviews. She is an African American woman in her late 20's. She has taught for 8 years in early childhood at a total of two centers, both in a smaller city in Eastern North Carolina. For five of those years, she was working on her associate's degree; she completed her degree in the mid 2000's. In her work, she has taught all age groups from infants to school age children, but has primarily worked with preschoolers. The first center in which Selena worked was not very culturally diverse, but she remarked that her current workplace was much more diverse. In fact, in her current classroom there were six ethnicities represented from across the world. Selena felt that her personal experiences growing up with a best friend who was Native American taught her there was "a bigger world than just my world".

**"Just try to tie it in".** Throughout the interview, Selena discussed several specific ways in which she tried to "tie in" culture into the curriculum. Her primary mode of including culture was to "look at the regular calendar, and try to say at least something about each holiday". She stated further that exposing the children to these different holidays was important for their knowledge: "so they [the children] can say they've heard of it. Cause if haven't nobody ever told 'em, they won't even know about it". Additionally, she felt that children from diverse cultures needed to know that they were acknowledged in the classroom, "I try to pull in something towards their cultural



diversity so that they'll know, 'oh okay, the teacher's talking about me right now'."

Selena also mentioned including dolls, art projects, and books/pictures that represented different cultures in the classroom activities, and that she would focus on representing the cultures of the children in her classroom.

Moreover, Selena was proud to discuss how she and the children participated annually in a center wide "international day". During the weeks leading up to international day, each classroom studied a different country and then presented information, activities, and food on that country to the rest of the center. Selena mentioned several of the classroom activities the children would do in preparation for this international day. For instance, she noted that "some of them [the parents] brought in different statues from [their country], different clothing materials...[and] we did flags.... And we did a taste-testing thing of different things from different countries... [and] we made paper head wraps". Although Selena did discuss more frequent inclusion of learning activities regarding different cultures than the other teachers, all of the classroom activities and discussions were still focused on outward aspects of the children's cultures.

For Selena, the primary way that she learned about children's cultures was through the parents. She mentioned frequently how involved the parents were in the classroom and that this was a benefit for everyone. From her perspective, "it's [parent involvement] a reward to the children and to us, you know, because it helps us to understand...what goes on in their household, and it helps the [other] children to understand the children". Selena also attributed the lack of challenges in the classroom to how the parents were "good" because "they come in, they laugh, and they're willing to hear everything we

have to say”. As evidenced in this statement, Selena’s discussion of her relationships with the parents often seemed one-sided. Although she did mention that the parents were eager to share information about their culture (e.g., “they will give us anything, I mean pamphlets, or anything that we ask for, they’re really willing to give it to you”, the teacher more frequently noted the parents were good listeners, and did not speak of herself listening to the parents. Statements that support this one-way line of communication include: “so what we’re telling them, they’re really taking it in and listening”, and “when you got those good parents that actually are concerned and listen to you, that really helps out”.

The most interesting tension found in Selena’s story was that she seemed to operate implicitly from a deficit model of understanding children’s cultural practices. At the same time that she shared several ways that she and the children benefited from including different cultures in classroom, she also provided numerous examples of how different cultural practices were not normal or accepted in the classroom. Selena was proud to mention how the children were taught to behave differently at the center than they did at home. The following are examples of the situations Selena described. First, there was a child from Africa and Selena remarked that “[when] she walked, she was jumpin’ a lot”, which Selena felt was a cultural behavior linked to African dancing. In response to this behavior, she “talked to the mom, cause we didn’t want it to become a problem with the other children.... So now she [the child] walks normal”. Another example involved two young children from Southeast Asia who did not feed themselves at meal times. Her reaction to this was that “when they [the children and parents] come into this classroom,

we talk to them about independence...myself and the other teacher we have been talking to the parents about independence” and that “we don’t feed them in here, that’s baby room stuff”. Throughout her interview, she seemed to be unaware that she was operating from negative perceptions of different cultural behaviors. Though she was able to acknowledge that these behaviors were manifestations from their cultures, Selena’s message to the children and families was that they needed to conform to American ways of behaving in an early childhood classroom.

### **Salome**

Salome is an African American teacher who was born and raised in a rural county in central North Carolina. She is in her late 40’s and recently completed her associate’s degree in early childhood education. Salome has 6 years of experience in ECE; she has fewer years of teaching experience than other teachers her age because she worked for many years as a supervisor at a local factory. However, she feels as though teaching has always been her true calling. During her time working at her current child care center Salome has taught children from diverse cultural backgrounds including Native American, Asian, African American, and European American children. Currently, only European American and African American children are enrolled in the classroom. Salome also remarked that her personal experiences of both school segregation and desegregation as a young child influenced her teaching and acceptance of all children.

**“Some people have a job, but I think this [teaching] really is my calling.”**

Salome’s spirituality was a primary influence in her teaching and personal life. In her personal life, she expressed that her faith and her family had helped her through various

struggles over the years. From her perspective, she learned from her mother and her church “it was God that kept us strong, that kept us afloat”. Professionally, Salome’s spirituality also guided her work with young children. She noted several times during the interview that teaching was her calling. Additionally, Salome discussed how her faith helped her work through challenges that she might have with families and children. For instance, she expressed that she would sometimes feel fear concerning teaching, “[I would be] afraid that I wouldn’t know what avenue to take, you know, to teach them”, and that prayer and “just believing in that prayer” was the main way for her to overcome that fear to teach children from different backgrounds. When asked why she felt prepared to work with children from diverse cultures, Salome answered, “number one, my love for God and number two, my love for people and my love for children”. Although these responses were in relation to children from diverse cultural backgrounds, Salome also remarked that this was her general approach to teaching.

For instance, another way that Salome’s spirituality was evident in her teaching was her belief that the primary goal of teaching is to nurture children. She also discussed that her life circumstances of growing up in a large, low-income family and experiencing nurture from her mother prepared her for caring for young children in these ways. She felt a responsibility to care for the children in her classroom as if they were her own, expressing repeatedly that “once they walk through that door...they are mine”, and “these young ones are mine, I have them longer than they [the parents] do in some cases, so I get attached to them”. Moreover, this responsibility was especially great for children in poverty, or those children who had a disability or difficult family circumstances. In fact,

her main form of adaptations to her classroom practices could be characterized as changing the level of emotional support she provided for a child. As an example Salome remarked that, “it was the ones that were poverty stricken or less fortunate that were the most attached and I think I kinda nurtured them more”.

Though Salome emphasized her nurturance of young children, she also discussed some ways in which she tried to incorporate children’s cultures and languages into the classroom. Her approaches included bringing in food and traditional dress, having “ethnic foods” in the dramatic play area, and speaking Spanish during group time. However, many of these activities were infrequent occurrences (e.g., “every year, I try to make at least one flag from a different country...and at Christmas we try to do Kwanzaa...and Hanukkah”), or on a surface level (e.g., “we do something in Spanish every day. We are up to ‘five’ right now with our Spanish”). Thus, like many of the other teachers, Salome expressed a positive viewpoint of diversity, but there was only limited inclusion of children’s culture and language in the classroom.

## **Denah**

Denah grew up in a small town in central North Carolina. She is African American and in her mid-50’s. In her 20 years of professional experience, she has taught infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school age children. In these classrooms, there have been African American, European American, Asian American, and Latino children. Currently, there are only African American and Latino children in her classroom. Denah completed her associate’s in ECE a few years ago, and hopes to continue her education one day.

Personally, this teacher did not interact with many people from different cultures while growing up, but she expressed that her spirituality taught her that, “people were people”.

**“See how they embrace one another”.** Similar to Salome, Denah felt that her spirituality guided how and why she taught young children. For Denah, her spiritual beliefs and customs helped her accept the individuality of young children. She stated that, “because we [her family members] were allowed to be ourselves, it has taught me to allow children to be themselves...to understand their individuality and try to embrace that and bring it into the classroom setting”. Denah further expressed that it was important to her that everyone, parents and children, felt as though they were “a part of the classroom”. She discussed this idea in terms of “embracing”; she believed it was important to “embrace the children” and teach the children to “embrace one another”.

The examples Denah shared concerning “embracing the children” demonstrated a strengths-based perspective of children. For instance, she described a child that some people may see as “being bad” in a more positive light: “she’s just a spunky person”, and “she has leadership qualities”. Additionally, instead of putting children “in one basket”, Denah felt it was important to “really learn the child [so] you can understand where they’re coming from and you can understand what they’re doing, why they’re doing it”. This perspective also motivated her to include books, toys, and posters in the classroom to reflect the children’s cultures.

However, in regards to helping the children “embrace one another”, Denah focused on teaching the children “we’re all one”. One of the ways she did this was using books and dolls to talk about the differences and the similarities among people. As she noted,

“we can talk about, ‘well sometimes we grow up where our hair texture is different’, and they learn how to embrace that....[then] I may go and say ‘y’all [the child and the doll] have the same eyes even though our skin may be different.... Even though we got differences, we all grow up as one”. Thus, the tension present in this teacher’s story was that she expressed it was important to accept children and families individually, but also indicated that children are all the same: “there are some differences in their cultures, but basically...they act alike. You know, it’s children”.

This tension may have caused a few unintended conflicts with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. Denah discussed two instances in which families left the classroom and the center. Both situations involved children who did not speak English, and although she tried very hard to communicate with the children and parents and welcome them into the classroom, she had difficulty creating trusting relationships with them. Though Denah did note that she regretted these struggles (e.g., “I hate that I didn’t know anything...about her culture”), she also learned from them, feeling that she could be better prepared for the next time she had children who were English Language Learners in her classroom.

### **Krystal**

Krystal is in her mid 40’s years old and lives at the outskirts of a large city in Central North Carolina. She is Native American, and describes the experience of growing up different from her peers as influential in her life and teaching. In terms of education, she is the only teacher who does not have a degree specifically in ECE. Instead, she earned her associate’s degree in Human Services. This educational training did include courses

on educating young children and child development, but focused more on social work issues such as substance abuse and poverty. However, Krystal's professional experiences have been primarily in early childhood as she has been teaching for the last 16 years. During that time she has worked with African American, European American, Asian American, and Latino children. Currently, she has African American and European American children enrolled in her class.

**“I was different. I was the odd man out.”** For Krystal, her personal experiences of being from a different culture than most of the other families where she grew up has helped her to welcome children and families from different cultures into her classroom. Specifically, this teacher is from a Native American tribe, but did not live near a reservation or participate in regular Native American traditions growing up. Although she had friends from different cultures growing up (primarily African American and European American cultures), Krystal expressed she often felt left out. In her words, “it was really difficult because I wasn’t black enough to be black, and I wasn’t white enough to be white”. Additionally, because her family did not always follow the practices of her tribe, Krystal was also called an “apple Indian...red on the outside, but white on the inside”. Because of these differences, Krystal noted that “it took me a while to find my way” and learn as her parents taught her, “no one is better than you and you are better than no one”. Further, Krystal now attributes these experiences to her current ability to be accepting of the different cultures represented in her classroom.

Krystal also felt that her experience of being different, combined with her father's eagerness to introduce his children to other cultures (most often in the form of food),



gave her a curiosity for learning about different kinds of people. According to Krystal, “I love different ethnic groups and stuff like that so I’m always trying to find out about that and....I always go to their [other groups’] cultural events”. Krystal further expressed that she frequently talked with families to understand their cultural practices; as she stated, “I’m so nosey about their culture like ‘what do you guys do here’ or ‘why is this’, not to be offensive or nothing. I just ask all kinds of questions”. She even provided a few examples in which discussing specific practices with parents made her “more sensitive to their kid’s needs”. For instance, when a four-year old child from a different country was still using a pacifier, Krystal noted that she was able to talk to the parent and accept that behavior in the classroom. Because of these experiences, Krystal expressed that it was important for teachers to “put yourself [out] there” and learn about the parents’ perspective and cultural background. It is interesting to note, however, that Krystal continually used the word “nosey” to describe her curiosity and willingness to learn about children and their families. Even though she acknowledged that she “genuinely want[ed] to know” about different cultures, there was an implicit message that having a curious nature and asking questions was seen as a negative trait.

This trait of “being nosey” also helped Krystal be open to including different foods and books, and celebrating diverse holidays in the classroom. She noted that, “I always try to include everyone’s traditions and beliefs...or ask them if they have something they’d like to share”. Despite this willingness, the inclusion of culture in Krystal’s classroom was often on the same, surface level as the other teachers interviewed. Additionally, Krystal expressed a similar tension between the similarities and differences

of children that can be seen in the previous individual stories. Specifically, Krystal stated that “people are basically the same across the board no matter what their culture is or whatever. They just want to know that someone is gonna accept their kids with open arms”, and “that everybody’s different and the same. They all want to be treated the same way”. Therefore, in her teaching, Krystal wants to “make sure that no one’s singled out...I just treat everybody the way I want to be treated”.

### **Annabel**

Annabel is a European American woman in her early 30’s who has been teaching for 12 years in central North Carolina. She finished her associate’s degree in ECE just a few years ago. During her time in the field, Annabel has taught all age groups and a wide variety of ethnicities; in her words, “I’ve taught everything from Caucasian to Vietnamese”. Currently, the children in her classroom are African American and European American. Annabel also mentioned that she has worked with children from a broad spectrum of socioeconomic statuses. As evidenced by her story below, Annabel expressed that she has always interacted with individuals from different cultures and that these experiences have helped her “be more open-minded”.

**“I have children that are biracial.”** For Annabel, personal experience has been paramount in her teaching. She attributed much of her understanding and acceptance of children from different cultures to her personal experience of going to a high school that was “predominantly African American”. From this experience, Annabel stated that she learned “their views and how they do things, how it’s different from how Caucasian families do things and what they believe”. Although she frequently expressed that there

were cultural differences between African American and European Americans, she did not discuss one way of being as better than the other. Specifically, Annabel felt that these experiences made her “more open-minded, not just believing that things are done the way that the Caucasian family should do it. There’s other ways of doing things and believing”.

Annabel’s experience of having biracial children was also a very important part of her personal experience navigating two cultures. With her children, she stated that she was comfortable acknowledging both cultures in their lives, “we do a little bit of what my family does and then a little bit of what their dad’s family does, so it’s kind of all combined together”. This familiarity of combining cultures in her personal life, also helped Annabel to incorporate different cultures in her classroom. However, she did not go into much detail about how this was done: “[I] bring activities into the classroom that reflect their culture or have a day where maybe somebody from their family comes in and talks about their culture or some type of food”. Annabel also noted that it was important to “adapt your classroom and yourself to be able to meet their needs”, but still did not provide specific information on how she adapted her teaching strategies.

Interestingly, Annabel was one of the only interview participants to mention racism, although she did so implicitly. Her primary challenge working with some families from different cultural backgrounds was that,

You still have people in this world today that think ‘oh, my child should only go to a White school’, [or] ‘oh, my child should only be with African American people’...and then when they come into the center and then there’s a mixture [of races and cultures], then it’s like ‘oh no’.

Annabel further described that this discrimination was not only directed towards children and families, but also to her: “I get this all the time...a parent [says], ‘oh, is that White teacher here today’... so that’s kind of difficult. It bothers me a bit”. However, when asked how she handled these comments and perspectives, Annabel remarked that she would “just brush it off...I don’t let it bother me because I’ve had to deal with it ever since high school”. She did note, though, that having biracial children sometimes provided her with a way to relate to diverse families. Annabel stated, “I deal with a lot of them [racist remarks] until they know that I have biracial children...but then they’re like ‘oh, okay, well you might be one of us’”. Although she did make this specific connection during the interview, it may be that Annabel’s personal experiences with different cultures and feelings of discrimination influenced her primary emphasis to ensure that children did not “feel left out in the classroom”. She described her main adaptations to the classroom as “mak[ing] them feel like you are one of them, so that they don’t feel different or the odd ball or anything like that”, and maintained that children from diverse cultural backgrounds are “teachable just like any other race”.

### **Group Themes**

Across the teachers’ individual interviews and stories, several themes that resonated with multiple teachers have emerged. In particular, the themes presented below suggest:

- 1) there exists a tension within teachers’ narratives regarding children’s similarities and differences;
- 2) teachers’ current work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds only addresses observable aspects of culture;
- 3) that the connections among educational,

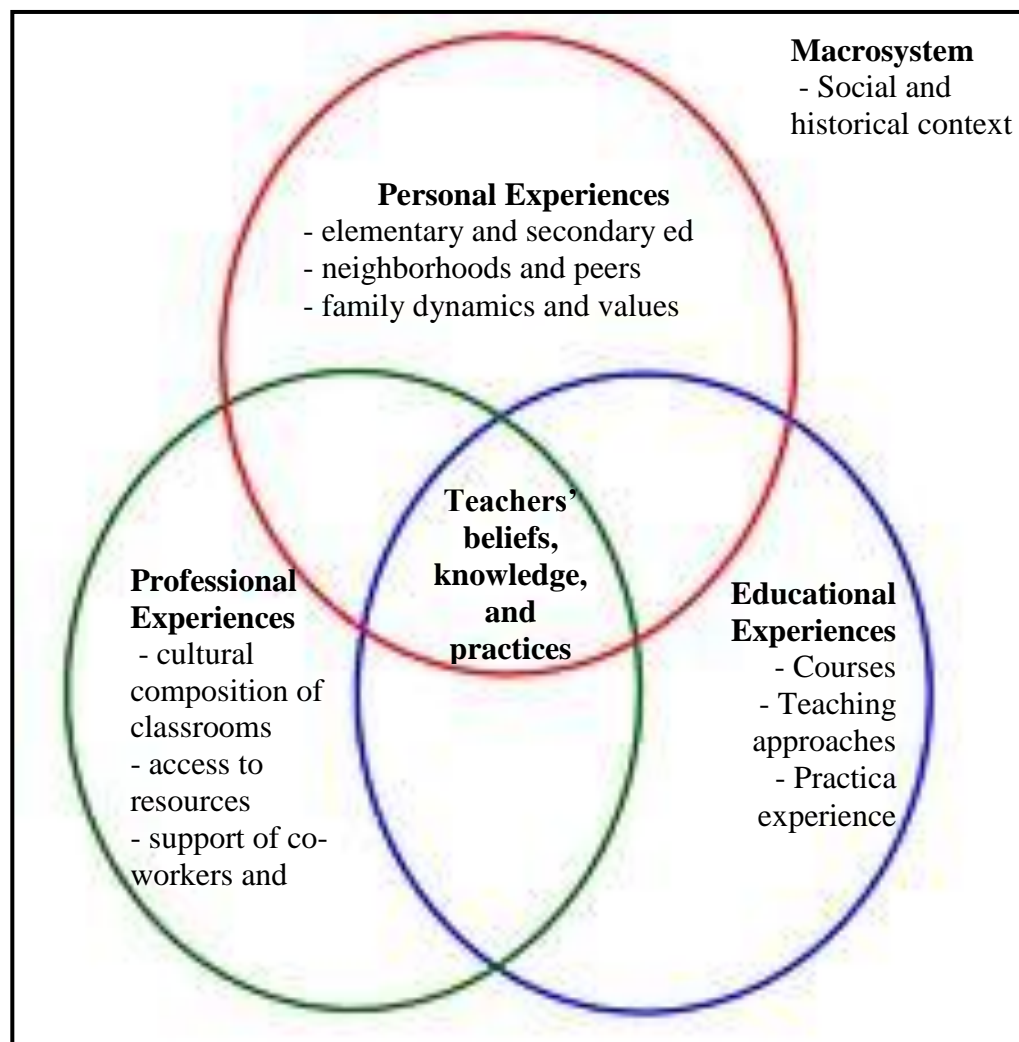
professional, and personal experiences are vital to teachers' work with diverse groups of children; and 4) that teachers are in need of experiences, education, and professional support to help them engage with children from diverse cultures on a deeper level than they are currently. These themes are organized around the qualitative research questions that asked what are teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices with children from diverse cultural backgrounds, and how have their experiences (educational and otherwise) regarding various forms of diversity influenced their teaching.

After analyzing the interviews and finding the individual and group themes, it was apparent that the original conceptual framework (as seen in Figure 1) did not reflect the teachers' narratives about their work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Therefore, the conceptual framework was revised to include the personal and professional experiences that teachers felt were important to their beliefs, knowledge, and practices with young children (see Figure 2). The primary change in the new conceptual framework is the inclusion of educational, professional, and personal experiences as all working in conjunction to shape teachers work with young children from diverse backgrounds. The overlapping circles in Figure 2 demonstrate this connectedness among the types of experiences. Furthermore, teachers and their characteristics (beliefs, knowledge, and practices) were moved to the center of the figure to represent that their work with children from different cultures exists within all three types of experiences. Finally, the large circle encompassing all of the other elements of the conceptual model reflects the macrosystem or the sociohistorical context that informs teachers' experiences within their college classrooms, work settings, and personal lives. It is important to note

that each element of the model is thought to interact with the other elements in a reciprocal manner. Just as the teachers' experiences were shaped by the broader social context, teachers' experiences and their work with children from diverse cultures is also influencing the larger sociohistoric perspective. The themes and discussion below will reflect this revised conceptual model.

Figure 2

*Revised conceptual model of teachers' experiences, beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices*



### **Professional Beliefs, Knowledge, and Practices**

Thus far, the findings within teachers' individual and collective stories have demonstrated how the teachers' experiences in different areas of their lives have shaped their teaching and their perspectives. The focus will now turn to descriptions of teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices with children from culturally diverse backgrounds to answer the research question concerning how teachers are currently thinking about their teaching and acting on these thought processes. Figure 2 depicts how teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices are components of the teachers' work and influenced by their various experiences.

**Beliefs.** In almost all of the interviews, participants discussed believing both that children are all the same and that children are all individuals. Interestingly, none of the teachers described feeling a tension between these seemingly contradictory beliefs. As seen in their statements, it may be that many teachers' beliefs are in regard to different aspects of the child. In response to questions about children's culture or ethnicity, many of the teachers felt it was imperative to perceive all children as the same. However, when discussing children's individuality, the teachers noted that children were individuals in terms of their unique personalities, ability, socioeconomic status, and family structure.

***We're all the same.*** From the teachers' perspectives, children's needs and behaviors did not change based upon their cultural or ethnic identities. As Ramona discussed, children "all need the same thing...they all need help with social skills...with emotional, social, all the areas of their development". Because of this perspective, Ramona did not feel it was necessary to make changes to her classroom based on children's cultures; she

stated, “I’m gonna treat ‘em like kids.... I’m gonna teach them the same way”. Similarly, Candace expressed that children “all act the same no matter what their nationality is”. For Candace, these similarities in children were mostly due to their age, “more or less a three year old is a three year old, they are going to play and act no matter what culture they are from”. Though Ramona and Candace did acknowledge that children were from different ethnic groups, they felt that this should not affect their teaching or treatment of children. Tashina, however, took this perspective one step further; from her point of view, there were very few differences among people in general. She remarked that, “I don’t really see color....people are people, people were created by whoever you believe your creator is and...we’re all one color”.

Some of the other teachers articulated that there were some differences in children’s races or culture, but were still adamant that above all, children were the same. In Denah’s words, “I embrace culture, but it’s ‘let children be children’.... you can tell there are some differences in their cultures, but basically as a whole they, I mean, to me they act alike. You know, it’s children”. Adele only noticed differences in language: “I guess that’s just like everybody’s just like me. I mean you might speak a different language, you might have an accent, but I mean we’re all the same”. She further noted that her goals for teaching were the same regardless of the child. As she described, “my goal is trying to get them socially and academically ready....whether they’re Spanish or anything else, I mean it’s all the same”. The stories of Charlene and Krystal portray a similar understanding of young children. Though there may be a few differences, it is essential that everyone was treated similarly and for the children to understand their similarities.



For instance, Charlene described an activity she did with the children regarding race. She would bring in “like a brown egg and the white egg and we’ll talk about the differences on the outside and then we’ll crack it open and we see that once we crack it open it’s all the same on the inside”. This was an important lesson for Charlene and she even stated that, “I think I’ve done this one [egg activity] forever”. Although Krystal first expressed that, “everybody’s different and the same”, she also remarked that “people are basically the same across the board no matter what their culture is”, and that, “they all want to be treated the same way”. Salome was the only teacher who did not use the words “the same” to describe children. However, she did discuss that it was important for her to teach the children in her classroom that people could come together and find a “happy medium”. She stated, “this is our world and this is their world [the diverse children] and then we all come together and then it’s our world”. This statement suggests that children should see commonalities in “our world” rather than focusing on differences.

***“Different children need different things”.*** Despite the emphasis on children’s similarities, the majority of the teachers also reported that it was important for their teaching to understand children individually. Most often, these discussions of differences were in response to children’s personalities and a desire to be prepared for the ways children might react to different situations. There were few statements that described how children’s cultural differences might influence their behavior, reactions, or interactions in the classroom. As Candace stated, “you need to know how they react to stuff...just how their behavior is and all, you know, what you can do to help them”. However, in this discussion of needing to know the differences among children, Candace was primarily

focused on if the children had any sort of learning disability: “like I’ve got a couple in here that has more problems learning stuff...I have to sit down with them...to help them catch up with the others”. In this statement, children’s learning differences are acknowledged, but there was still a push for children to be on the same level of cognitive understanding and abilities. Moreover, Charlene expressed that getting to know a child individually, “helps us to be able to communicate better, because...there’s a lot of times you don’t know why a child is doing some of the things they do....knowing that [child] you can understand better and relate better to that child”. Following this statement, however, Charlene then noted that she did not need to make any changes to the classroom based on this knowledge of the children.

Several of the teachers mentioned that understanding children’s personalities and developmental abilities was vital to their teaching. Tashina remarked that, “it’s important to know a child as an individual because you can work with that child, you can deal with that child different...you have to deal with children as they are, as their own personality. And that’s how I interact with mine [the children in her classroom]”. Similarly, Ramona stated that in her teaching she “had to learn to be a teacher of ten kids at one time...so I’m learning that we plan ten steps each day. And that gives me something to build on. ‘Okay, I can work with you on this. We can work with him on that tomorrow’”. Finally, Salome felt that “every one of them had individual personalities. If you have fifteen children, you have fifteen different personalities. And to know their quirks, to know their strengths and weaknesses to me is vital...so there is some kind of way you are going to have to involve them”. However, she further described this involvement off all children

as “you just involve everybody. You call on the middle one...then you call on the smarter one”. These statements suggest that Salome did try to take into account children’s differences in her teaching, but she perceived differences in children’s personalities or development and not their culture.

It is important to note that teachers’ beliefs did fall on a continuum; throughout their interviews some teachers focused more on children’s similarities (e.g., Candace and Ramona), whereas other teachers emphasized children’s differences more frequently (e.g., Denah and Selena). Overall, the participants did express both perspectives on young children and that understanding the similarities and differences among children were helpful for their teaching. As discussed later, teachers’ understanding of children as “different and the same” may be a reflection of their educational, professional, and personal experiences. Nevertheless, none of the teachers viewed these differing perspectives as contradictions within their beliefs systems.

**Knowledge.** The teachers’ specific knowledge of the children and their cultural backgrounds currently enrolled in their classrooms also range from less knowledge about culture and pedagogical adaptations to more knowledge about how to understand and incorporate culture into the classroom. At one end of this continuum are teachers who had difficulty articulating anything about children’s cultures. The other end of the continuum reflects teachers who had some knowledge of children’s cultures and felt more certain about teaching strategies to use with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. All along this continuum, however, teachers’ depth of knowledge regarding

culture remained on the surface level. The teachers' also mentioned knowledge (or lack thereof) concerning language was sometimes a challenge in their classrooms.

***“I’m not sure of her culture, but she is different”***. This statement reflects the most extreme end of the knowledge continuum. One teacher in particular was at this extreme; in the interview, Salome frequently could not describe the cultures of the children in her classroom. For example, when asked to talk about the different cultural groups she had taught, she stated, “I had one, um, I think she was West Indian.... And then I had one little boy that was adopted from. Where was he from? Oh, I forget now.... Where was [the child] from? I remember we used to show it to them on the map.” It had been three years since she had taught these two children, so the lack of knowledge may be attributed to memory. However, Salome also discussed one young girl in her class currently; her only description of the child was “I’m not sure of her culture, but she is different”. Interestingly, Salome was able to remember more details regarding children’s socioeconomic statuses and family situations than she could recall about children’s culture. It seems that these other forms of difference were more salient pieces of information on these children.

Other teachers were better able to name the cultures of the children in their classrooms, but still did not provide much detail regarding children’s cultural practices or differences in behaviors. Charlene noted that in her previous classrooms she had “just mainly the Hispanic population, and...I had two children here that were from [East Asia]”. However, she was unable to name specific aspects of the children’s culture except the different languages the children spoke. Selena was able to discuss some detail of

children's cultures, but not for all of the children she had taught. For example, she knew specifics about the food and clothing from an African nation that she and the children had studied for their international day (which also reflected two of the children in the classroom), but was unable to name anything specific about another child in her classroom the previous year. She expressed, "I've had this one girl, they were from...I'm not sure where they were from, but they knew how to speak Spanish". Denah recalled an instance in which a lack of specific knowledge about a child's culture created a challenge for her teaching. As Denah described, "I had a little Asian child in my room. I didn't do anything, didn't know anything about her culture...she spoke perfect English...but I still didn't understand anything about her culture".

There were only two teachers, Annabel and Krystal, who reported feeling very confident in their knowledge of children's cultures and how to adapt their teaching accordingly. Although Annabel did not offer specific details regarding children's cultures, she stated that she had the knowledge to "incorporate different activities and things like that in the classroom for children of another culture". This knowledge primarily came from "having the experience of working with all different types of cultures and then my personal experience with having biracial children". Krystal also felt that she was prepared to work with children from different cultures because of her knowledge gained because of her personal trait of curiosity and professional experience. She stated, "I'm nosey. I like to find out everything...I just ask all kinds of questions". From her perspective, this trait combined with the fact that "we have every nationality

here [at her center]” helped her to know about children’s cultures and accept the children into her classroom.

**“I can teach ‘em, I just can’t talk to ‘em”.** Many of the teachers reported that not knowing how to speak the same language as the children was the biggest barrier for working with children from diverse cultures. Specifically, Denah described a situation in which she had difficulty communicating with a child: “because I couldn’t speak the language she couldn’t understand what I was saying. She would cry...and the more I tried to talk the more she would cry...So I hate that I didn’t know anything...I just didn’t know anything for her”. As seen in her individual story, Adele felt that she was not prepared to work with children who speak different languages. She felt that before she could teach diverse groups of children she needed to “learn basic languages...so if I have one [a linguistically diverse child] come in next week I wouldn’t just be ‘duh’.” From Ramona’s perspective she was prepared for any form of difference other than language: “If they didn’t speak a different language I think so, [but] I’m not prepared to do that...I couldn’t communicate with them verbally. It’s my dilemma. I don’t speak a different language”. She further stated that “I can teach ‘em, I just can’t talk to ‘em”. Thus, Ramona had confidence in her knowledge of early childhood education, but did not feel knowledgeable enough to teach children who speak a language other than English.

When the teachers did not have adequate knowledge of a child's language, it was helpful for them to have someone else in the center who could act as a translator.

Although Annabel noted that, “language barriers I think is a biggie because you think that you understand, but then when it happens, it’s something totally different...”, she felt that

she could rely on her director to help with communication issues. Charlene also expressed that language was not as much of a challenge because a co-worker would often translate: “it wasn’t that it was a big barrier because we...had [someone who spoke] Spanish. So if it was like something that I couldn’t understand from them or they couldn’t understand from us, we could always ask our Spanish teacher”. However, not all of the teachers had such a resource; for these teachers there was a need for more knowledge of children and their home languages.

***“It’s really nice to see things from their culture”.*** No matter where teachers were along this continuum of knowledge, the majority of the teachers expressed some desire to learn more about children’s cultures and/or languages. Charlene noted that she liked learning about different languages and cultural practices: “I wanted to learn more about their customs and their beliefs as well...I think there’s always room to learn more”. Similarly, Krystal remarked throughout her interview that she loved learning about different cultures; “I am always trying to find out about that”. In Salome’s classroom, she tried to include Spanish so that “if I ever get one [a child who speaks Spanish], I want to be ready”. Adele was unsure of where to begin learning more about different cultural groups, but did ask specifically about diversity courses. She inquired, “If you find any more diverse classes just let me know and I’ll be glad to take some”.

Moreover, some teachers felt that their primary reward for working with children from different cultures was learning more about those cultures. Denah stated that she enjoyed the “learning of the cultures and things. How they interact with one another and even learning, I don’t know much, but just a little bit, a portion of their language”. She

further described how she and the parents in her classroom were teaching her their languages. In her words, “sometimes they [the parents] help me. Like if I’m trying to speak to them and they’ll help me understand a word... and they’ll be able to tell me how to speak that”. From Tashina’s perspective, “it’s fun. I like learning it [different cultures] and it’s motivating me more to know about this background or other backgrounds”. Thus, it seems that the teachers were eager to learn more about diverse cultures and would even seek out those opportunities from educational settings and parents in the classroom. It is important to note too that their desire to learn extended past gaining new understandings of cultural diversity; each of the teachers expressed that they wanted to continue on in their formal education regarding all aspects of early childhood education.

**Classroom practices.** Overall, the teachers did report that they tried to make changes for children based on their cultures. Again, teachers fell along a continuum in which some teachers made very few adaptations to their practices and other teachers made more frequent changes in their classrooms. Even so, these adaptations remained on the surface level of understanding culture and focused only on holidays, food, and outward appearances of children’s cultures. When discussing their practices, some teachers also worked from a deficit model of diverse cultures although this was always implicit. In these instances, their statements implied that American ways of behaving in the classrooms were “normal” and children should conform to these behaviors. Finally, although these practices are not specifically focused on the children, the teachers regularly mentioned their relationships with parents and how it was important for their teaching to try and involve the families in the classroom. Teachers ranged, however, on



how open they were in allowing families to bring elements of their cultures into the classroom.

***“I try to say at least something about each holiday”.*** The majority of the teachers discussed that they introduced children’s culture to the classroom through different foods, holidays, and at times, languages. For example, Krystal noted, “if we’re doing holiday themes and stuff like that I always try to include everyone’s traditions and beliefs and talk about them or ask them if they have something they’d like to share or they’d like to bring in for us or read a book”. Salome discussed bringing in food and doing some art activities as her primary way of incorporating children’s culture in the classroom:

I used to try to include a lot of stuff that was her culture....I kinda did some studying and would bring in the corn, the popcorn or something like that....some dress, we found some colorful dress. And we made some headdress. And I think one time...seems like we made her flag.

For some teachers like Denah and Annabel, much of the inclusion of culture in the classroom was in the form of classroom materials. Denah expressed,

we always include [culture], if it’s in the way of books or toys or whatever. We always try to include that. Right now, I’m in the process of putting up posters like the shapes in Spanish and English, so trying to bring that more into the classroom...not only just have it sitting there but actually, you know, working with it and everything.

Annabel stated that,

we made tacos one time...and there were like clothes that we bought to put into our housekeeping area so that they could dress up, um, posters that we’ve put on the walls that represent different cultures and disabilities and things like that.

Although culture was probably included most frequently in Selena's classroom, it was still in the form of celebrating different holidays and doing art projects. In her words, "like we're talking about Hanukkah right now, so I usually have books on what I'm talking about...and I read the book to 'em first, then I ask questions, 'do anybody celebrate' whatever we're talking about...I do a little art work and different stuff on the subject". When asked about how she decides what to include in the classroom, she responded, "I try to, I look at the calendar, the regular calendar, and I try to say at least something about each holiday. Even Ramadan, just different things". She also noted that

we've got books and stuff in there...so the children would have something to look at and see pictures that look like them....I ordered a few baby dolls from different cultures...in my food section, I ordered foods that was from different countries...cause, you know, we supposed to tie in different cultures and stuff like that.

For several teachers, the inclusion of culture was discussed, but did not occur regularly. In fact, some of the teachers stated that it had been at least six months since they had done any specific activity regarding culture. Adele noted that, "sometimes we'll do a diverse or cultural theme and then we'll do maybe some food that they cook...we haven't done it this year". Similarly, Tashina remarked that, "

Once a month I try to, I haven't done it in the past 6 months now, but...we try to go on what we call a around the world trip...either it's for the week or either it's for the whole month and um, we'll try to taste the food from that country and stuff like that...as far as the language with the English and Spanish, we're supposed to do that all the time. We have words up around the classroom, but it never went too far, you know, other than Dora the Explorer.

In Candace's classroom, she expressed that in the past she has include different foods in her classroom: "we used to before...we had different meals, from different cultures. Mexican, Chinese...we used to be able to do that. We haven't done that in the last few years. But, just to teach the kids the different foods and different cultural foods. And I think that's good for them to learn all that stuff. So that was about it". For Ramona, she tried to include some different languages in her classroom, but this attempt was short lived. As she stated, "actually we tried an experience here. We tried to incorporate different greetings from around the world....It took off okay, but as we got into different languages, it just didn't spark...so we went back to 'good morning'". Taken together, these statements suggests that teachers know of some ways to incorporate elements of children's cultures in the classroom, but these are only surface aspects of culture. Furthermore, in some classrooms, regular inclusion of culture does not seem to be a top priority to the teachers.

Interestingly, children's religious practices came up in only three interviews. In two of the classrooms, the teachers had children who were Jehovah's Witnesses and did not believe in celebrating holidays and other special occasions. In both of these classrooms, the response to these children was to either rename the celebration so that it could not be considered a party, or to have the party when the child was not in the room. As Tashina mentioned, "so anytime we have birthday parties, holiday parties, they had to be taken out of the room or here we had to name our Christmas party, we had to say winter party or fall party, not Halloween". Similarly, Adele noted,

we actually got one [child] starting that's a Jehovah [sic] so my celebrations in my room are going to kind of have to change now...the birthday parties, not to consider them birthday parties, just be a little celebration. We still do Christmas though so there we told the parents that we would let them know if they decide they still want to bring [him] that's fine...or I would try to do it on a day that he's not here.

Selena had a Muslim child in her room who, in her words, "don't celebrate religious holidays". Her solution to this religious diversity was,

as far as the religious part, keep that out...so sometimes that's a little difficult when we're doing different programs, cause like we have our Christmas program coming up...and the parents just want to make sure that we didn't say anything about the Christianity stuff in it. So basically in the center we just say Santa Claus.

Thus, the religious component of culture seemed to be overlooked more than other aspects of culture and had a very limited place in the classroom. Overall, regardless of the culture or component of culture teachers' classroom practices remained on the surface level. There was neither substantial discussion of understanding and allowing for differences in children's behaviors or ways of being in the classroom, nor adaptation of teaching strategies to interact with children in culturally responsive ways.

***"When they come in this class, we talk about independence"***. Not every teacher used language that implied that children from diverse cultural backgrounds should conform to the current ways of behaving in the classroom. Nevertheless, there were several statements made by teachers that suggested they were operating from a deficit model of culture. The most blatant examples of this perspective were found in Selena's interview. As seen in Selena's individual story, there were several times in her interview in which she discussed how she and other teachers had taught the children from diverse

cultures to behave more like the “American” children in the classroom. She helped a child who was “jumpin’ a lot” to walk “normal”. She also worked with two children to learn to feed themselves, because “when they come in this class, we talk about independence”. Thus, in Selena’s classroom teaching children to be independent was a primary developmental goal, even if such behavior did not reflect their cultural practices or values. Selena further noted that she valued how the children could adapt to the classroom quickly, “because they’re so young, they kind of adapt to everything American...you won’t really know that they’re from the different places”.

Other forms of this deficit model were subtle. Adele’s emphasis on teaching children English and only speaking English in the classroom demonstrates this perspective. For instance, Adele discussed that her main priority for diverse children is to “try to teach them English”. Although teaching children English can be an important cognitive and social developmental goal for young children, studies have also shown that children benefit from seeing, hearing, and speaking their home language in the classroom (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Prieto, 2009). Adele further noted that if there were several children in the classroom who did not speak English, “then it kind of slows down everything else in the room for all the others...the whole, you know, my lesson would have to change. I’d probably have to downsize some of it to get the other half ready to where this half is”. Charlene also mentioned that she would need to change her pace of instruction with children who did not speak English: “I do feel like I had to go maybe just a little slower with them only because of the language barrier”. In Tashina’s interview, the deficit model was manifested through her language of comparing diverse populations

to “regular people”. Statements that support this include: “well, we work with them just like they were regular people”, “we treated them just like regular parents”, “if the child was different...as far as behavior or something...if I had a concern about that then I would sit down with the families...other than that, they’re really just like regular people”. In the above statements, teachers seem to be using American language and ways of behaving as the reference point for how children and families should act in the classroom. Thus, teachers may include some elements of culture in the classroom, but they have an implicit goal of having the children from diverse backgrounds behave in ways that fit the teachers’ expectations.

***“They kind of go with what we do here”.*** Many of the teachers were proud of their connections with children’s families and saw parents as a source of information and support in relation to their teaching. Although some of the teachers primarily focused on how they would work with parents in general (i.e., “it’s basically the same as you work with any other family”), a few teachers discussed how they involve families from diverse cultural backgrounds. For Krystal, talking to the parents helped her understand some of the children’s behaviors. One example of this was when a four-year old child from another country was still using a pacifier. Krystal stated, “I was like, ‘what in the world’, but then you talk to their parents and you’re like, ‘oh, okay’”. Thus, when Krystal was able to talk to parents about different behaviors in the children, she felt she could then respond more sensitively to their children: “it makes me more sensitive to their kids’ needs.... It’s more personal”. Candace also expressed that talking to parents helped her learn more about children’s home lives. In her words, “well they talk, I talk to them when

they come in...and then we invite them in.... I think it's good. That way you get to know how they [the children] are being raised and what they are doing, you know, as far as how they are raising the children." She also noted, "like the holidays, I mean it would be good if I knew what they did at their house". Denah discussed inviting the parents into the classroom to share some of their cultural practices. She stated, "I open it up and like Thanksgiving is coming up and I'm asking one of the parents who does have an Indian [Native American] background to come in and work, you know tell things that they do in their culture, or come bring and show things. Um, and that's basically it". As presented earlier, Denah also invited a parent to teach her Spanish: "they'll be able to tell me what, how to speak that...then she may celebrate me if I catch hold of something she's saying". Overall, Denah felt it was important for parents to "feel like they're a part of the classroom" despite the fact that she "didn't understand the language or whatever or their culture".

Interestingly, some of the teachers discussed if children from diverse cultures had "good" parents. From their perspectives, these good parents were those families who were willing to work with the teachers to help the children learn how to adapt to the classroom. Salome discussed a family in a previous class, "now the mother of the little West Indian girl, she was just wonderful....like I said, she would talk to me a lot... and I let her know, you can talk to me about anything...and she would let me know and we would work together". Moreover, Charlene stated that, "the families were great because they were so eager for their children to learn. You know, they wanted them to learn our language, to learn our customs, to learn our traditions". Although she did note that she

was willing to learn about their ways, she remarked that the parents would say, “ ‘No, don’t try to speak Spanish, speak to them English. They know English.’ Because they wanted them to learn.” Throughout her interview, Selena discussed how it was important to get to know the families of the children “so you could relate to them”, but also mentioned several instances in which she would talk to the parents about changes that needed to occur in their children’s behaviors. As evidenced by her individual story, her relationship with parents was very one-sided. For example, her interview included statements such as, “they’re willing hear everything we have to say”, and “they’re really taking it in and listening”.

Finally, there were a few teachers who did not have much communication with families from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, this may be because the teachers are not asking the parents questions about their cultures. In regards to the child from Africa enrolled in her class, Adele mentioned that, “both his parents never really talked about his cultural background cause they kind of go with what we do here”. Although her classrooms did “have a parent time where they can come in and read to the children and if they want to actually talk about their cultural history they can”, Adele did not discuss any specific attempt to reach out to this family to understand their cultural practices and values. Additionally, Tashina did not want to ask detailed questions of the families who had diverse cultural practices. As she stated, “I never did ask them personal questions about why they believe or what”. She noted further that she would only ask questions of the parents if there was a behavioral concern with a child. In all of these statements concerning families, there is a similar sentiment regarding culture that is



present in the themes about children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Specifically, there seems to be an understanding of only superficial elements of culture and the best way to include families is to use the same strategies that one would with any family. The focus on superficial elements may be a result of either teachers feeling as if they are intruding on families' personal lives and information or teachers being afraid to address controversial issues such as race and culture openly because they do not want to offend anyone (Bernhard et al., 1995; Gay & Howard, 2000).

### **Educational Experiences**

Among the teachers interviewed, there was not much variety in terms of highest level of education or field of study. However, there was wider variation in teachers' educational experiences in terms of college attended, length of time in college, and courses taken. None of the teachers attended the same college, and the length of time in college ranged from 3 years to 9 nine years. In terms of courses taken, most of the teachers did take general child development courses, as well as teaching methods courses for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. However, fewer teachers had taken classes on specific developmental domains such as physical or social and emotional development or teaching strategies like numeracy or appropriate learning environments. The number of teachers who had taken courses in relation to family, cultural, or linguistic diversity also varied. Specifically, the majority of the teachers had taken a course on working with families and almost all of the teachers had taken a course or workshop regarding some form of cultural diversity; however, none of the teachers had taken a course on working with bilingual children and families. Table 11 displays the college courses completed by

the teachers who participated in the interview. Despite the variance in teachers' educational experiences, there were still three important themes that emerged within each of the teachers' stories. However, many of the teachers' descriptions of their educational experiences were focused on more general courses and occurrences than on their classes regarding cultural diversity.

Table 11

*Topics of college courses completed as reported by interview participants*

| <b>Course Topic*</b>   | <b>Percentage of Teachers</b> |
|--|-------------------------------|
| General child development  | 90%                           |
| Education and care of infants and toddlers                           | 100%                          |
| Education and care of preschoolers                                   | 80%                           |
| Education and care of children with disabilities                     | 100%                          |
| Working with families  | 70%                           |
| Working with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds | 90%                           |
| Working with bilingual children learning English                     | 0%                            |
| Assessment and observation   | 100%                          |
| Emergent literacy and literacy strategies                            | 70%                           |
| Numeracy and math  | 70%                           |
| Social and emotional development                                     | 80%                           |
| Physical health and motor development                                | 60%                           |
| Appropriate learning environments and activities                     | 80%                           |
| Classroom or behavioral management                                   | 90%                           |
| Early childhood program administration                               | 80%                           |
| Collaborating with professionals                                     | 50%                           |
| Professional knowledge (e.g., ethics)                                | 70%                           |
| Leadership and advocacy  | 80%                           |
| Research and evaluation methods                                      | 40%                           |

\*Note: This list of course topics is taken from Maxwell, Lim, and Early (2006).

**Culture in college classes.** Unfortunately, the participants' experiences in courses dealing with culture were not as salient for their teaching, primarily because the discussions of culture remained on a surface level. For many of the teachers, the inclusion of culture consisted of learning about materials to put in the classroom and a few activities to do with young children. In Annabel's class she learned, "how to incorporate, make your learning environment acceptable to families of another culture and activities you can bring in for those children". Similarly, Candace stated, "I can't remember a whole lot, but I remember they did talk about the different cultures and bringing them into the classroom...and how they [the other cultures] were different from ours". In these statements and others made by the teachers, there were few references to any class discussion on how to adapt teachers' interactions in a culturally responsive manner. In fact, Denah was the only teacher to mention that her cultural diversity class helped her, "understand that my way, my way of doing things may not be your way and then how to recognize children that come in the classroom that may be taught those things". However, Denah further noted that the only strategy she was given for incorporating children from diverse cultures in the classroom was "how to bring in cultural diverse things into the classroom and be willing to try to learn more about their culture". Thus, when culture was discussed in classes, teachers were not challenged to change their thinking, given strategies for adapting interactions, or helped to understand the ways in which oppression or discrimination might be present in their classrooms.

A few of the teachers did indicate that courses differed in terms of how much information was provided on culture. For Charlene, culture was a small part of each of her classes which helped her understand the importance for including culture in her early childhood classroom: “I probably would not have thought about it that much about it, you know, had it not been instilled in probably every education class”. Selena, however, felt that some courses include culture more than others. In her cultural diversity course, the class was structured so that, “they had a topic and then they talked about the different cultures...like it could be how you deal with stress, that might be a topic and then we talked about different cultures, they way they deal with stress”. Although it seems that the class was focused on ways of living and behaving in different cultures, Selena did not mention that the class made specific connections between these discussions of different cultures and teaching young children. Instead she stated, “they would basically in a nutshell just tell us to learn all you can learn about other people’s cultures”. Selena further noted that in her other early childhood classes, “they talked about it [culture] enough to say they talked about it”.

The teachers also expressed that their college course lacked specific assignments and practical experiences with children from diverse cultural backgrounds. According to Candace, it was “just learning about it and talking about it. I think that’s all we done, we didn’t have to do an assignment”. In fact, only two of the ten teachers interviewed could recall a single assignment (from all of their courses) that focused on young children from different cultures or who spoke different languages. Moreover, no teachers were required to complete a practicum with diverse groups of children. Selena was required to do “find

a child, two different children of two different cultures and you had to tell a little bit about their day”; there was no additional reflection or activity to follow up on this assignment. Ramona had to do a presentation on culture for part of an administration course. In her words, “we did a presentation on everybody, each race. We took one of the books and brought it to life about how the Chinese people eat certain rice, Spanish people eat certain rice, [and] Cajun people eat certain rice. And what we did, we supplied different types of rice and talked about different ethnic backgrounds”. This presentation, however, was not enough to teach her how to work with diverse children. Ramona stated, “I couldn’t have taken anything back and just started teaching a different culture”. Furthermore, there was no evidence that her courses helped her gain an in-depth understanding of culture. When asked if this presentation was helpful, she remarked, “Not really....And it wouldn’t matter if I had an Indian, a Mexican, an African. I’m still gonna be who I am. I’m gonna treat ‘em like kids”. The lack of detailed discussion, assignments, and practical experiences in relation to children from diverse cultures explains why diversity courses were not emphasized as influential for these teachers. As discussed earlier, these active learning experiences were especially meaningful for teachers and need to be included in diversity courses to encourage more student engagement and deeper levels of understanding.

**Meaningful learning.** In terms of the context of teachers’ educational experiences, there were several specific teaching approaches, strategies, and courses that the participants identified as meaningful or influential for their teaching. Many of these factors are similar to those presented above; the teachers valued opportunities to apply

their learning and engage interactively in the classroom. Specifically, there were three primary methods that were helpful to the participants. First, the teachers enjoyed engaging in hands-on and group activities in the college classroom. Denah remarked that such learning experiences provided her with knowledge she could use: “it taught me how to work directly with them [the children], you know, hands-on things, activities, and ideas, and even how to come up with my own ideas about doing things”. Moreover, Selena felt that having practical opportunities provided her a chance to solidify her knowledge. As she noted, “in most of my early childhood classes, that’s why I said I loved them, ... it was more hands-on, and it made you understand what you was really talking about”. Although not all of the teachers completed a practicum experience during their education, those who did expressed that such classes were particularly helpful because of the hands-on nature of the coursework. For instance, Annabel recalled, “we were able to go and do like our observing kids or hands-on activities and things like that”. Tashina also liked that such a course let her, “come inside the field and see what’s going on”. These statements reinforce that practical experiences and activities both inside and outside of the college classroom are vital to early childhood teachers.

The teachers also indicated that class discussions, as opposed to “basic lecture” were essential to creating an engaging and memorable college course. As Charlene pointed out, class discussion was important because “it really made you get involved. It made you want to learn more about what the topic was”. It did not seem to matter what form the class discussion took, as long as teachers were able to give voice to their experiences and understandings. For Selena, large group discussion and conversations about possible

situations with young children were most useful. In her classes, “we didn’t just sit down and read books, we had a lot of open class discussion.... We had different scenarios...and you had to evaluate the scenario and find your best solution”. For Candace, the fact her classmates were all female was an important component of the class discussion, “it was the teacher and a group of women, and we mostly just talked about different stuff, we didn’t do a lot of book reading [during class].... We would just sit and talk about all the different ways that you read in the chapter”. In one of Tashina’s classes, the discussion was paired with skits and role-playing, which she noted was particularly beneficial. She further stated that this particular professor, “was interesting, she didn’t just say the same thing, she didn’t just give an assignment and you just had to do it you know. We had a lot of class discussion, a lot of feedback, and she made stuff plain”. Overall, these statements indicate that teachers’ enjoyed being engaged in class discussion and activities because these strategies allowed them to process what they are learning in school and from their professional work.

Finally, some of the teachers felt particularly engaged in college classes in which the professors shared their own professional experiences. As Candace noted, “I liked the way that most of them [college professors], they talked to you...just like we would. I mean that they didn’t actually, you know, read from a book. They taught from their experience.” For three of the interview participants, it was especially meaningful to hear about their professors’ personal experiences. For instance, Charlene had a teacher who was from Africa. She liked that “he taught us a lot about his culture and they way he grew up and... what education meant for him”. Charlene expressed that knowing this



about her professor made her “work harder”. Similarly, Krystal had a teacher from Puerto Rico who would “always have a real life story” as examples for specific concepts in class. Salome’s course on children with disabilities was taught by a woman with a physical disability in her hands. In her opinion, “she [the professor] was so good, she could write, she could do everything. And she was so adamant about how she had to grow up and learn...I guess that stuck with me...taking that class under her...it just made it stick”. It seems that hearing from their professors’ personal experiences and hardships was inspiring for these teachers and made them more interested in the course content.

Overwhelmingly, the participants remarked that how their professors taught was as important for their learning as the course topic and assignments; in Annabel’s words “good teachers make good classes”. Most of the teachers characterized the quality of professors primarily by their level of care for their students. Krystal noted that she liked having a personal relationship with her professors, “they knew me by name and it was just familiar, it was very comforting....I could talk to them and I really liked that”. Denah echoed this idea, “they were very concerned about you, you getting it [the knowledge]. If you had problems, they would get in there and they would help you and...they’d make suggestions”. For Denah in particular, being approachable and showing a personal concern for each students’ learning was what kept her engaged in classes: “If you want me to participate...you gotta show an interest in me”. It was also important for professors to provide encouragement for their students, although the participants needed different types of encouragement. Annabel stated that she liked being challenged by her professors: “They were there if you needed them with any help on your work or anything.

They basically pushed you to be the best student”. However, for Adele it was better if her professors helped her relax. She like the “don’t stress yourself out, you’ll get there type teacher”; this was beneficial for Adele because “I’m not a good stressor...if it was really uptight then I probably would not have done as good as I did”. Salome needed affirmation from her professors. She recalled one in particular that, “had a lot of faith in me....she really encouraged me, ‘Yes you can. You’re smart. You’re talented’”. Though the teachers benefited from different types of encouragement and varied in the closeness of their student-professor relationships, it is clear from their stories that supportive relationships were essential for engaged, meaningful learning.

It is interesting, and a little troubling, to note that few of the statements presented above were describing courses regarding cultural or family diversity. Instead, when asked about courses and professors that inspired them and influenced their teaching, the teachers more often named their general child development courses or classes on working with children with special needs as the courses that stood out to them. The teachers who discussed the general child development or introduction to education courses as most meaningful were often those teachers who did not intend initially on early childhood education as their career path. Thus, these teachers started their work with a limited understanding of the complexities of early care and education. Specifically, Selena noted that her credentials class was “the very first thing I took”, and “by me going to that credentials class...it really opened up my eyes to like a whole different world that there’s more to dealing with children besides just watchin’ [them]”. Similarly, Denah remarked that when she first started teaching she thought, “ok, this is gonna be a pad job. You

know, it's watching children play. How hard is that?". However, when she started taking her introduction child development course she felt that it, "helped me to understand the child development and how to understand how they develop as individuals, as well as some of the things they can be alike in". In particular, this course taught Denah about the various aspects of development: "You got social, emotional, you got to learn how to work with that. The physical development....even language, all that stuff play a part in how to really be, I say, a good teacher".

Some of the other teachers who were more familiar with general child development emphasized their courses on children with disabilities as influential primarily because it challenged their current understandings of children. According to Tashina, this class helped her broaden her perspective on what counted as a disability; until she took the class, she "didn't realize that there were so many special needs...that was a heart touching class for me". Selena had a similar experience. She noted that the class helped her understand that, "sometimes you think of a [child with] special needs as somebody with a disability. It's beyond that". For Charlene and Candace, the disabilities course made them reflect on what they could actually do with children who have special needs. Candace thought her course, "taught [me] how to interact with children with special needs and stuff like that". Charlene described it as a class that, "just really brought things home...it challenged you in a way of saying, 'okay, am I really equipped to do this?' Because you never know what kind of child or what special need a child may have". In these classes, teachers had experiences that made them confront their current understandings and shift to new ways of thinking about teaching young children. None of

the teachers expressed that this sort of paradigm shift occurred in courses dealing with diversity.

**Connection between work and school.** For all but one of the interview participants, there was a strong connection between work and school due to the experience of going to school part-time while working full-time. Although every teacher who had to juggle both work and school stated that “it was very hard”, “very exhausting”, and included “some long days”, everyone also expressed that having an immediate connection between educational or formal knowledge and practical experience was beneficial for them. Some teachers emphasized that working allowed them to try out the various strategies and teaching methods they were learning in the classroom. As Denah remarked, she liked “just being able to bring all that stuff back and sitting in [the college] class and your teacher say something, ‘wow, I can use that’, and go back to the classroom and actually use it”. Other teachers echoed this sentiment. Selena expressed that, “I was reading stuff in the book, but then when I came here [to work] I was actually able to see those same things that I read about”, and Charlene noted that, “I could apply what we were learning in the textbook”. Moreover, Candace thought it was helpful to bring the hands-on activities she completed in the college classroom to her center: “We had to do projects and I would bring them here when we were done with them [for children’s activities]”.

It is important to note that there was a reciprocal nature to this connection between work and school. Teachers not only were able to apply their learning to their classrooms, but they were also able to bring ideas from their work into the college environment. Tashina felt this was especially helpful for her: “when we get to talking about these

things that I'm kind of already experiencing...I can really get into this conversation".

Annabel also remarked on the reciprocity; she expressed, "this [what I am learning] is going to help me at my job, this is going to help me at school". Annabel further discussed that what she learned in school was as helpful in her personal life as it was in her professional life. As she reflected, "I could bring in the ideas that I learned from school into my job, so that helped me be a better employee and then taking those [ideas] home to my own children". In these statements, there is evidence that it is important for teachers to have regular opportunities to apply their learning, as well as share their experiences in educational and professional development settings.

This finding also supports that there is an interconnectedness among teachers' educational, professional, and personal experiences. However, it seems that almost all of the teachers placed a higher value on their professional, rather than their educational experiences. For these teachers, reading about child development and teaching did not give them enough knowledge of how to work with young children. As some of the teachers remarked, "all the book knowledge ain't gonna matter until you get into the room", "book knowledge is good, but it's nothing like hands-on", and "hands-on beats school any day". Such hands-on experiences were particularly important when real life situations did not exactly follow textbook explanations. For example, Charlene stated, "not always can you read it and you know what it says [but] it doesn't always work". Similarly, Krystal noted, "you can read about it and even put it into theory...but you never know what happens until it happens and then you're stuck with 'oh, how am I gonna do this'?".

Furthermore, some of the teachers mentioned that “trial and error” or reflecting on their mistakes were meaningful forms of learning for them. In Annabel’s words, “you can sit in a [college] classroom all day and have somebody tell you how to do something, but then til you actually do it and get to see how it is and how it feels and what the outcome is and how you can learn from mistakes [then] you know better things”. According to Candace, it was the differences in children’s reactions that made practical experience necessary: “it is better with the kids, working with the kids, and knowing how kids react than it is from just reading how they would in a book”. Likewise, Denah felt that it was the actual interaction with young children that she learned from practical experience. She expressed that, “professionally speaking it gave me more [of] the personal touch to it, rather than the educational part. Cause you can have the education with the personal touch”. Despite the emphasis on practical knowledge, all of the teachers did discuss that school was mostly a positive experiences for them and that some formal knowledge was helpful in their teaching. As Ramona pointed out, it really was a combination of the two ways of knowing that was important for her: “you always need to know, you need some book learnin’ on a little bit of everything...[but] if I’m gonna learn it, I need to be able to use it or I’m gonna lose it”. Overall, this theme demonstrates the need for teacher preparation programs to provide multiple, on-going opportunities for teachers to experience and reflect upon these connections between work and school. Nevertheless, these connections were more salient in terms of general knowledge about young children than in relation to their different cultural backgrounds.

## **Professional and Personal Experiences**

Educational experiences were not the only events in teachers' lives that have influenced their beliefs and practices in relation to children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Theoretical and empirical work on teachers' beliefs and thought processes has highlighted that personal and professional experiences are also important aspects of teachers' lives that shape their teaching (Hoy et al., 2006; Lee & Dallman, 2008). The following are findings that demonstrate some of the ways in which personal and professional experiences have affected the teachers in this study. This presentation will especially concentrate on how the differences in teachers' life and work events may shape their current inclusion of children from diverse cultural groups.

**Professional experience.** As evidenced by earlier statements regarding the connection between work and school, the interview participants perceived professional experiences as invaluable. Nevertheless, there was wide variety in work experiences among teachers, both in terms of actual interactions with children and families and the level of support teachers received from centers. Most of the teachers expressed they have not had much experience with children from diverse cultures. These teachers include Candace, Adele, Charlene, Ramona, Salome, Tashina, and Denah. In their work settings, this group of teachers had classrooms that tend to have only African American and European American children enrolled. (It is important to note here, that although I would identify African American and European Americans as having different cultural practices, many of these teachers did not make that distinction. Thus, from their perspective these teachers have had little experience with children from diverse cultural

backgrounds.) During her time teaching, Adele noted that “I really didn’t see a lot of diversity backgrounds.” Rather, most of the children she identified as diverse were placed in the More at Four classroom at her center. Similarly, Charlene remarked that “other than white and black” children, “I don’t think there’s been any other nationalities”. When asked about the different cultures in their classrooms, both Salome and Ramona noted that there was diversity in terms of socioeconomic statuses, but did not focus on many cultural differences among the children they have taught. Although this group did discuss some ways that they included culture in the classroom, these teachers more often mentioned the similarities among young children and seemed to feel that there was less need to adapt their practices according to children’s cultures.

Conversely, Selena, Annabel, and Krystal felt that they had encountered more diverse groups in their classrooms than the other teachers. This group of teachers seemed a little more confident in their ability to work with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds and tried to make changes in their classroom practices concerning culture. Annabel noted that she has “dealt with all cultural backgrounds” in her teaching. She expressed that, “at first it was kind of weird”, but through her professional experiences “of working with all different types of cultures” she felt prepared to “bring activities into the classroom that reflect their culture”. In Krystal’s center, she saw learning about culture as an important part of her job “because now there’s everything here. I mean we [the center] have every nationality here”. From her perspective this exposure to diverse groups of children taught her “that everybody’s different and the same”, and how to not “pass judgment” on children and families. Although Selena did not have much exposure



to multicultural groups in her first workplace, her current center was much more diverse. In her words, “where I used to work at... the cultural diversity wasn’t like it was here...But here I’ve come across a lot, a whole lot”. Selena discussed how this increase in diversity has taught her about communication with families and children from diverse cultural backgrounds: “So since I’ve come to work here I’ve learned, you see it [culture] on TV or in a magazine or something, but actually talking to somebody....is a little different....But it’s a really good experience to be able to talk to some of them that [are] different”. Though not all of the teachers made explicit links between their professional experiences and their work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds, their statements and stories seem to support the idea that having more experience with diverse groups of children has made them more comfortable acknowledging some of the children’s differences. However, even along this continuum of professional experiences, the teachers’ perspectives on how to create culturally responsive classrooms still emphasized only the surface level of culture.

The teachers also varied in terms of the amount and types of support they received from their directors and co-workers to make their classrooms more responsive to diverse groups of children. For most of the teachers, support came in the form of translators for children who spoke languages other than English. Annabel mentioned that her “director knows enough [Spanish] to carry on a conversation. So we have her if we don’t understand something”. Denah also noted that, “we did have a lady here that, she was Spanish...so a lot of times we would find her so we [teacher and families] could connect with one another”. Adele’s assistant teacher spoke Spanish and was able to translate for

the children from Latino backgrounds in her classroom. However, she did note that she sometimes has to ask the assistant teacher to “not speak quite so much Spanish to get the child to speak more English”. Similarly, co-workers sometimes provided information regarding cultural practices. Charlene discussed a co-worker from Eastern Asia was able to be an informant for her classroom: “she would be the one that we would go to ask different questions about their celebrations and things like that”. Selena was the only teacher to mention having a center wide “international day”, as well as a director who “is really, really tough on culture diversity”. For Selena, this emphasis on culture across the center has helped her feel more prepared to work in a multicultural classroom. Regardless of the exact form of support, the teachers felt that it was very helpful to have other people in the center who could serve as a resource when working with children from diverse cultural backgrounds. This finding highlights that understanding child care programs’ resources and climate concerning culturally responsive teaching could be an important factor for future investigations.

**Personal experiences.** As evidenced in their individual stories, this group of teachers falls along a wide spectrum in terms of life experiences with individuals who are different than them. Some teachers have had extensive interactions with different people, whereas other teachers have grown up with little contact with other people from different cultures. Additionally, the teachers’ interactions with diverse groups of people included both conflict and unity. On one end of these continuums there are teachers like Adele and Denah who stated they did not interact very often with individuals from different cultures than themselves. As Adele described, “I mean other than black and white, we were pretty

much the same. There was not really a lot of Spanish, Hispanics in our neighborhood”. Candace also mentioned that there was only one family in her neighborhood that was different from her: “There was some Mexicans that lived above us....they came down there, they played with us, we played with them”. However, she further discussed that from these interactions she learned, “they were just kids like us”. Tashina’s experiences with people from different cultures were “just, you know, when you see them in school, but [not] on my own personal time, no”. At home, Tashina was taught that “people are people”; as she described, “we didn’t hear White or Spanish or anything like that, they were just children, they were just people”. None of these teachers felt that any of the limited interactions they had with people from diverse cultural backgrounds were negative.

At the other end of the spectrum are those teachers who have had more involvement with people who differ culturally. Selena’s experience with individuals from different cultures during her childhood primarily consisted of her friendship with a child who was Native American. She discussed how they would attend different cultural functions and participate in family traditions. From these experiences and interactions, Selena feels as though she has “learned that it’s not just about my family”. As seen in Annabel’s individual story, she attended a school in which most of the student body was from a different cultural background. Like Tashina, her interactions with diverse groups of people was primarily limited to school, rather than with her family or other relationships outside of school. Although she mostly described her experiences as positive, Annabel did imply that there were some negative interactions during her time in high school; when

there were times of racial discrimination in her center she stated, “I don’t let it bother me cause I’ve had to deal with that ever since high school”. Nevertheless, Annabel felt these interactions made her “more open-minded” about cultural behaviors and ways of living.

Krystal and Salome also had some more difficult interactions with individuals from different cultures although these varied in intensity. Krystal’s Native American ethnicity was sometimes a barrier between her and her friends. As noted in her individual story, she felt that she did not completely fit with any of the cultural groups around her (e.g., African American, European American, or Native American). She explained that, “it was just weird because it’s like you’d be friends with your black friends and then all of a sudden they would get mad at you and...you weren’t cool enough to be black and then your white friends [would do the same thing]”. Thus, there were multiple times in which Krystal felt left out of her peer groups. From these experiences, Krystal was able to learn to love differences in people and turn these negative experiences into positive aspects of her teaching.

Salome’s first encounter with people from a different culture was perhaps the most difficult of all of the teachers. Specifically, Salome experienced desegregation of the public schools in early elementary school. In her words, “I can remember a lot of fighting and bickering and I was really, really scared. I can remember being very scared”. Several supportive adults in her life subdued her fear. For example, her “first white teacher...was very patient, very kind...but she stood her ground and tried to explain to us what was going on...I can remember her explain to some of my peers, the white children, that we would be there and we were no different. The skin color made us no different”. Salome

also discussed that the school principal and her own mother were sources of support during this scary time. She expressed that she felt nurtured and cared for by these adults. For instance, she remembered that the principal of the newly integrated school would say, “these are all my children”, referring to both the African American and the European American students. These experiences and the assistance from concerned adults influenced Salome’s desire to nurture others and teach young children.

Finally, for some of the teachers spirituality was an important personal influence on their beliefs and their practices with young children. When discussing their childhood experiences, Charlene and Selena noted that going to church was an important family ritual. Selena felt that this ritual taught her “how to love one another and it’s taught me how to love others as a person, as a whole”, and Charlene expressed that “growing up in the Baptist church. That helped me to understand the morals and the values and things that were important”. Although Charlene and Selena did not express other ways that their spirituality influenced their teaching, these experiences do seem to influence their beliefs about accepting others, as well as their personal values. For Salome and Denah, however, their spirituality was a primary influence on their teaching. As in Salome’s individual story, her “faith and prayer” and “calling” into early childhood education shaped her belief that her work was to nurture all children. In Denah’s classroom, her personal, spiritual experiences helped her to “understand their [the children’s] individuality and to try to embrace that and bring it into the classroom setting”. Thus, for these teachers, their spirituality guided how they perceived and interacted with young children in general.

No matter their specific experiences with people from culturally diverse backgrounds, each of these teachers felt that their personal experiences helped prepare them for their teaching, even if that teaching did not include culturally responsive practices. In fact, some of the teachers felt that personal experiences growing up were more salient than educational or professional experiences. This sentiment is best stated in the words of Salome, “you learn a lot about culture through life experience...If I had to choose one, two, three, it would be life, professional, and then education”.

### **Qualitative Discussion**

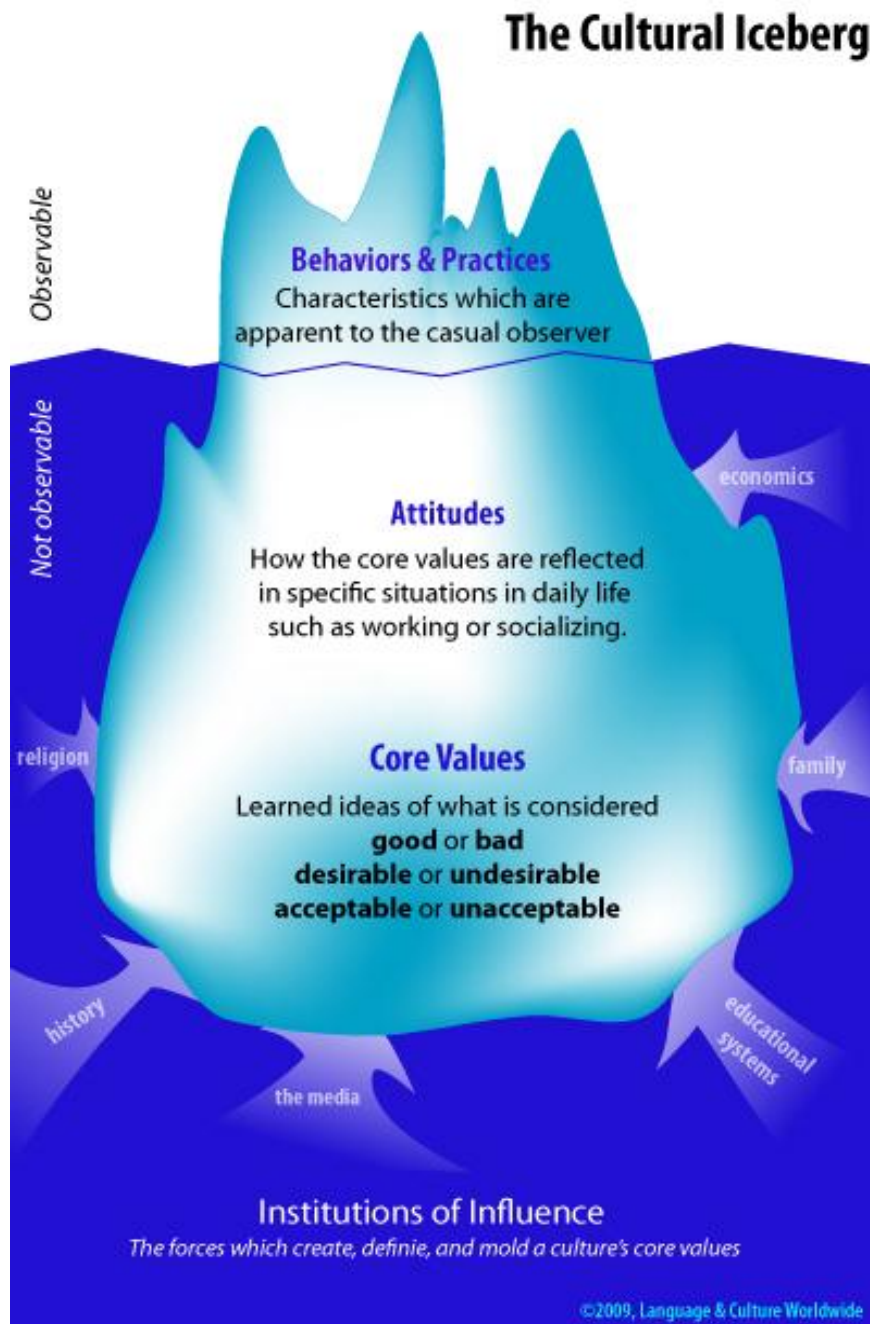
The focus of this discussion is to offer potential explanations for some of the qualitative findings from the current study. As seen in the teachers’ individual stories and group themes, their beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices in relation to children from culturally diverse backgrounds hold both commonalities and dissimilarities. In the group themes, teachers’ educational, professional, and personal experiences were presented to demonstrate how such experiences have shaped this group of teachers. Nevertheless, all of the teachers’ responses showed a general lack of understanding the complexities and nuances of culture, including how culture influenced child development and how to adapt teaching practices based upon children’s cultures. It is important to note, however, that teachers’ lack of deep understandings makes sense in light of their differing personal and professional experiences, as well as the absence of educational experiences that would provide such knowledge.

## **Icebergs and Culture**

Although culture is often defined as the beliefs, values, and customs of people groups that inform their worldviews, interactions, and behaviors, there is a tendency for humans to think of culture as only the observable elements such as language, dress, and holidays. Scholars of multicultural education have noted that this emphasis on such surface level aspects of culture may be conceptualized as an iceberg (see Figure 3; Weaver, 2000). From this perspective, culture contains observable and hidden aspects, all of which influence how people interact in the world. On the surface level are the parts of culture that can be seen or heard “by the casual observer” (Language and Culture Worldwide, 2009) including clothing, holidays and religious traditions, food, language, and some rules for interpersonal interactions. These elements are present at the conscious level of human thought and can be easily modified (Weaver). Underneath that surface, however, there is much more depth to the understandings and influences of culture. The components of culture that cannot be seen are the cultural values and attitudes that shape the observable behaviors through shared understandings of what constitutes “desirable or undesirable” (Language and Culture Worldwide). These elements are often subjective, exist within the subconscious mind of individuals, and are more difficult to shift or change (Weaver). Influencing all of these components of culture are various societal institutions: religious bodies, media and information systems, family, and historical and economic context (Language and Culture Worldwide).

Figure 3

*Depiction of Culture as an Iceberg*





The statements articulated by the teachers' throughout their interviews suggest that all of the teachers currently understand culture as just the tip of the iceberg. Their beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices with children from culturally diverse backgrounds are focused only on the observable parts of children's culture. This superficial conception of culture may also have made it difficult for teachers to include culture in the classroom in any consistent way. As discussed in the group themes, many teachers had not incorporated an activity regarding culture in their classroom in the last six months to a year. It may be that these cultural activities are only addressing the observable aspects of culture and therefore are not meaningful to the different children in the classroom. Teachers and children may not fully engage in such activities and as a result they are not regularly included in classroom practices.

Moreover, when culture is misunderstood in this way (as only including observable behaviors), it may be difficult for teachers to be open to the cultural values and traditions behind the outward practices (Weaver, 2000). Specifically, if teachers do not understand why a particular behavior is valued in a cultural group, then teachers may not be as willing to incorporate that behavior into the classroom or may judge the behavior as inappropriate despite the long-held tradition behind the children's actions. According to Milner (2005), having only a surface level perception of culture may also perpetuate negative stereotypes about diverse groups of people. Thus, the teachers' lack of deeper understanding of culture may account for the deficit model which has influenced some of the teachers in their efforts to have children conform to a more "American" way of being. According to Hoy et al. (2006), operating from a superficial understanding of culture can

have serious negative outcomes for children from diverse backgrounds. The teachers may not be able to appreciate the values and customs their culture has to offer to the classroom and children may be identified as outsiders within their own classroom. Although not all of the teachers in this study expressed negative perspectives, their simplistic understandings of culture may still lead them to alienation of children from culturally diverse backgrounds (Castro, 2010). Finally, when teachers do not understand all of the components of culture, they are unable to engage in critical thinking about their own biases and challenge the status quo of how children and families are incorporated into the classroom.

### **Experience and Culture**

In social cognitive theory, individual's experiences influence both internal thought processes and external behaviors (Bandura, 1989). As stated earlier, there were several differences in the contexts of teachers' educational, professional, and personal experiences. These divergences may provide some explanation for teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices and where each teacher falls along the various continuums (e.g., negative to positive beliefs, uncertainty to confidence in knowledge, and infrequent to frequent practices). In terms of educational experiences, the evidence from the current study shows that teachers are sometimes discussing culture in their college classrooms. However, these discussions are focused only on those outward behaviors that are a part of the top of the iceberg. Thus, it is unlikely that these teachers were given the opportunities in class to help them reflect upon the deeper aspects of culture and their own cultural biases. However, it seems that most of the teachers in this study had a desire to include

children from different cultures in the classroom, but were unaware of any negative perspective they had and often did not have the knowledge necessary to implement truly responsive practices.

According to Zygmunt-Fillwalk and Clark (2007), the process of “becoming multicultural” (p. 288) should include opportunities for teachers to examine and learn about the complexities of their own cultural history. Moreover, teachers need to have “an encounter which is an experience or event that shatters a person’s current feelings.... Such encounters force individuals to rethink their existing beliefs” (Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Clark, p. 289). Previous work has shown that when teachers were provided such learning experiences, they were often able to understand culture on a more sophisticated level (Kidd et al., 2008) and more aware of the places in which their practices and beliefs did not match (Middleton, 2002). Although these shifts in thinking were not always large, teachers benefited from beginning such a self-reflective journey (Dooley, 2008). Additionally, children from diverse cultures may still benefit from even small changes in teachers’ current understandings (Hollins & Guzman, 2005).

Professionally, all of the teachers in this study had some exposure to children from culturally and linguistically diverse; however, although these experiences varied in terms of cultures encountered and center support. The teachers also discussed personal experiences as important influences on their beliefs, knowledge, and practices. In previous empirical work, teachers noted that having more personal professional experiences with multicultural groups of children helped them have more positive beliefs and increased knowledge for their work with diverse groups of children (Bernhard et al.,

1995; Lee & Dallman, 2008). Conversely, teachers who had fewer experiences with cultural diversity tended to have more negative or simplistic perspectives on multicultural teaching (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Luykx et al., 2005). Though there is not a clear cause-and-effect relationship in the teachers' individual stories, the findings from this study do suggest that teachers with more personal and professional experiences with cultural diversity were more open to accepting diverse groups of children in the classroom and reported having more knowledge of how to do so. This was especially true for the few teachers who had experienced being different in some way during their childhood (e.g., Krystal and Annabel). Although teachers' personal experiences are beyond the control of teacher educators and program directors, these findings demonstrate the need for teachers to have more frequent experience with children and families from diverse cultures. Hopefully, as teachers are provided with a combination of educational and professional experiences to construct new ways of understanding culture and learn strategies for implementing their expanded knowledge they will be better equipped to include children from diverse cultures in the classroom in a meaningful way.

Finally, it is important to note that just as culture is shaped by historical and social contexts, so are teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices. There are two social influences in particular that may help explain the teachers' responses regarding their work with culturally diverse children. First, the emphasis on children's similarities may arise from teachers' personal experiences of discrimination. For instance, in the current study three teachers (Krystal, Salome, and Annabel) discussed specific situations in which they were the different people or the outsiders to a different culture. In these

situations, ethnic and cultural differences were used to exclude these teachers from social interactions with others. Furthermore, each of these three teachers described being hurt or scared by others who did not accept them. Historically, the cultural differences between people of color and white people have been used to oppress marginalized populations (Derman-Sparks & Brunson Phillips, 1997; Gay, 2000). Therefore, these teachers took their personal experiences of exclusion and tried to create a different environment for the young children in their classrooms. They each expressed a desire to ensure that all children were loved and accepted in their classrooms. This was accomplished by focusing primarily on children's similarities, as well as incorporating only superficial cultural distinctions in the classroom.

Additionally, although only one teacher characterized herself as color-blind, this rhetoric was present in many of the teachers' statements regarding children's similarities. This color-blind perspective was also evident when teachers reported that they did not need to make changes to the classroom based upon children's cultures. It is this kind of language that hinders teachers from examining their own cultural biases and being open to the benefits of a multicultural classroom (Gay & Howard, 2000). Though teachers who espouse this idea believe that they are welcoming all children in the classroom, they are actually ignoring important aspects of children's cultural identities (Derman-Sparks & Brunson Phillips, 1997). However, this color-blind perspective has often been encouraged both in education and American society in general (Castro, 2010; Derman-Sparks & Brunson Phillips). Some scholars suggest that teachers may be afraid of acknowledging differences in children because they think they will be labeled as racist or

offend children and families (Bernhard et al., 1995). Additionally, Gay and Howard point out that teachers may not want to admit that they are unsure of how to teach children in a culturally responsive manner. Thus, from the teachers' perspectives they are being more inclusive by adopting a "color-blind" stance.

Both of these examples demonstrate how the macrosystem, or larger sociohistorical context affects teachers' beliefs and practices with young children. Within the United States, the dominant European American culture tends to support the avoidance of conversations about race, culture, or other forms of difference (Gay, 2000). Thus, teachers who are from the dominant culture learn to accept this message that everyone is the same and should be taught in the same ways (i.e., methods that align with European American culture). Teachers who are not from the dominant culture are also encouraged to suppress their own ways of teaching and interacting with young children, and are taught that open discussion of racial or cultural differences are taboo (Cannella, 1997). It should be no surprise then, that young children from diverse cultural backgrounds are expected to conform to the "normal" behaviors exhibited by other children in the classroom (Gay). Within the teachers' stories, this pressure to assimilate to the dominant culture was even present in their discussion of parents. Many of the teachers expressed that parents wanted their children to learn English and adapt to American customs so that they would be successful in the broader, American society. Taken together, these influences may function to teach young children and their families to behave in ways that do not reflect their cultural values, and make it difficult for teachers to teach in culturally responsive manners.

In general, the qualitative findings show that teachers are caught in a tension between perceiving children as similar and understanding their unique cultural differences. These teachers exhibit a desire to learn more about cultures, but have had limited educational and professional experiences to help them shift their thinking to a more complex conceptualization of culture and multicultural education. Interestingly, the teachers' interviews indicate that many of the teachers have internalized and tried to implement individualized teaching strategies in their classroom. The teachers have also learned from their professional and educational experiences to include parents in the classroom environment. However, it seems that responding and adapting to the culture of young children and families has not been a part of the message that teachers have received and implemented in their classrooms. It is imperative that teacher preparation programs take teachers' current experiences and understandings into account so that all teachers can be supported through the process of learning how to become culturally responsive teachers of young children.

## CHAPTER VI

### OVERALL DISCUSSION

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative results portray early childhood teachers as holding mostly positive beliefs regarding children from culturally diverse backgrounds. However, these results also indicate that teachers are not always able to translate their beliefs into their practices. Specifically, the quantitative findings showed that there is a relationship between teachers' beliefs and knowledge, as well as a relationship between teachers' knowledge and practices. However, there was no relationship between teachers' beliefs and observed or reported practices. In the qualitative findings, there was a tension within teachers' beliefs regarding the similarities and differences among children, and a disconnection between their positive beliefs and a deficit model in terms of their practices.

Overall, the findings also showed that the relationship between teacher's education and their beliefs, knowledge, and practices was either non-existent or not salient from the teachers' perspectives. The lack of this relationship may be due to the superficial focus on culture in teachers' educational experiences, or problems in the measurement of these constructs. In addition, the overall findings demonstrate that personal and professional experiences are crucial elements to shaping teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices. Currently, there is little understanding of how these other experiences influence teachers' work with children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Finally, there is also



some evidence in both the quantitative and qualitative results that teachers exhibit a bias towards children who are from different cultures or who speak different languages.

Although each method found a distinct form of negative bias towards these groups of children, it is clear that teachers need support to help them work through such perspectives in order to create welcoming and responsive classrooms for all young children.

The following discussion will first focus on the convergences in the results found using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Then the discussion will turn to the dissimilarities among the findings resulting from the two methods. I will then offer several recommendations for teacher preparation and outline a few implications for early childhood education policy. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of the strengths and limitations in the current study, as well as directions for future research.

## **Commonalities**

### **Relationships among Teachers' Beliefs, Knowledge, and Practices**

The primary commonalities among the findings from the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study were found in the relationships among teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices. Both methodologies found associations among these constructs in teachers' work with young children from culturally diverse backgrounds; the similarities in the results are presented below.

**Teachers' beliefs and knowledge.** Quantitatively, teachers' beliefs predicted their knowledge, even when accounting for the percentage of children in the classroom who were from a different cultural background than the teacher. Teachers who reported more positive beliefs also reported having more knowledge of how to teach in multicultural classrooms. In the qualitative findings there was also some indication that teachers' beliefs and knowledge were related. For teachers whose beliefs focused more on the similarities among children, there was a lack of knowledge regarding specific details about the cultures of the children in their classrooms. Teachers who articulated that they believed children's differences were important seemed to be aware of more ways to incorporate culture into classroom materials and activities. Though there is some connection between teachers' beliefs and knowledge in the qualitative interviews, this relationship is not as consistent as the relationship found in the quantitative data.

The relationship between teachers' beliefs and knowledge is best supported by theoretical work on teachers' thought processes (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Teachers' beliefs often inform what kinds of knowledge they seek out and feel are applied to their classroom practices (Verloop et al., 2001). Based on the results of this study, teachers whose beliefs are more positive in regards to diverse cultures (or who place more emphasis on children's differences) may choose to obtain more knowledge of children's cultures. Nevertheless, results from this study indicate that teachers' beliefs and knowledge are still primarily on the surface level of understanding culture. There is currently some push for teachers to increase their knowledge of culture and culturally responsive teaching practices from professional associations such as NAEYC and

NCATE (Hyson & Biggar, 2006; Ponterotto et al., 2003). However, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and knowledge indicate that teachers' beliefs should be addressed at the same time that they are increasing their knowledge.

**Teachers' beliefs and practices.** Additionally, there were similar findings in both methodologies concerning the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices. In the quantitative findings, teachers' beliefs did not predict their practices on either the observation or the survey tools. There seems to be no relationship between teachers' beliefs regarding multicultural classrooms and the practices they implement. Qualitatively, there was some connection between teachers' beliefs and their practices, but these constructs often did not match. Specifically, many of the teachers stated positive beliefs regarding multicultural classrooms such as a desire to learn about children's cultures and an emphasis on the importance of understanding children as individuals. However, the practices described by several teachers reflected a deficit model of diverse cultures. The teachers whose beliefs and practices were similar most often espoused that all children were the same and did not make changes to their classroom practices in response to children's cultures. Thus, even in the qualitative findings, teachers' descriptions of their beliefs and practices were inconsistent. It is important to note that there was a tension between views regarding children's similarities and differences within some of the teachers' belief systems and this incongruence may make it difficult for teachers to identify their beliefs and implement practices that align with those beliefs.

Most theoretical work in teachers' beliefs proposes that teachers' beliefs are the guiding framework for teachers' practices (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Hoy et al., 2006; Pajares, 1992). In the results from this study, however, teachers' beliefs do not appear to function as a primary influence for their actions in the classroom. The most plausible explanations for this is that teachers' are either unaware of their beliefs about multicultural classrooms and groups of children, or that what they are stating as their beliefs are not true articulations of what they really value (Castro, 2010). In the former reason, teachers who have not reflected upon their personal beliefs and understandings of children from diverse cultural groups cannot then put these beliefs into action in any intentional way (Pajares). Some empirical work has demonstrated that teachers' do not reflect regularly on their beliefs and how these beliefs may inform their practices (Gay & Howard, 2000; Milner, 2005). Regarding the latter reason, Castro discusses that "institutional practices and structures are often masked by common sets of ideologies and beliefs – what Freire referred to as the 'myths which deform us'" (p. 199). Within this study, it seems that the teachers are entrenched in the myth that all children are the same (especially in terms of culture) and that it is appropriate to focus on children's similarities. Teachers then feel that as long as they are providing the same care for all children then they are engaging in equitable teaching practices. However, because this myth ignores important differences in children and their families, this practice of treating everyone the same and ignoring their cultural capital may actually be destructive or "deform[ing]" for these young children from diverse cultural groups. In addition, teachers then are less likely to question either their personal beliefs or the large institutional

ideologies (Castro). When this occurs, teachers begin to teach from a deficit model (Kyles & Olafson, 2008) or on a surface level (Weaver, 2000), both of which work to exclude children from diverse cultural backgrounds from the classroom.

**Teachers' knowledge and practices.** Finally, there was also a convergence of findings among research methods in relation to teachers' knowledge and practices. According to the quantitative data, teachers' knowledge was the only variable to predict teachers' practices. Teachers who reported having more knowledge for working with children from culturally diverse backgrounds also reported implementing more pedagogical adaptations in their classrooms. The qualitative findings also indicated that teachers who could discuss their knowledge of children's cultures and how to incorporate culture into the classroom implemented such practices more frequently. Conversely, the teachers who discussed not having a lot of knowledge concerning multicultural and multilingual classrooms also emphasized the difficulties in making changes to the classroom based on children's differences.

Theoretically, teachers' knowledge is an essential component of teachers' thought processes that guide their actions in the classroom (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992). As evidenced by the data from this study, teachers' perceptions of their knowledge may influence their confidence in and ability to adapt their practices. Although there is little empirical work on how teachers' knowledge functions to shape teachers' practices (Munby et al., 2000; Verloop et al., 2001), these results highlight knowledge as an important component in understanding and shaping teachers' practices.

### **Educational Experiences and Teachers' Beliefs, Knowledge, and Practices**

Unfortunately, significant associations among teachers' educational experiences and their beliefs, knowledge, and practices were not present in either the quantitative or qualitative findings. In the quantitative portion of the study, none of the correlations among teachers' level of education and their beliefs, knowledge, or reported practices were significant. These findings indicated that as teachers' education increased, there was no change in teachers' beliefs, knowledge, or classroom practices with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Similarly, teachers' educational experiences were not emphasized in the interviews as major influences of the teachers' perspectives and work with diverse groups of children. Although some of the teachers did discuss some of their educational experiences as important in their teaching, such experiences were focused on working with children with disabilities or general child development courses. Moreover, when culture was discussed in their classrooms, the learning activities remained on a surface level of understanding. Instead, teachers expressed that their professional work and personal experiences with individuals from diverse cultures was more influential in their current understandings of children from different cultural backgrounds.

The current research on teacher preparation programs shows that the operationalization of teacher education needs to go beyond teachers' level of education (Maxwell, Feild, et al., 2006; Tout et al., 2006), and there is a dearth of information on the context of teachers' courses (Maxwell, Lim, et al., 2006). Because of these limitations, it is difficult to make direct connections between teachers' education and constructs such as their beliefs, knowledge, and pedagogical adaptations. The results

from this study affirm that the field needs to expand their research questions regarding teachers' educational experiences (Bogard et al., 2008). As seen in the findings, research on teacher preparation needs to redefine the variables of teacher education to include courses taken, teaching approaches used, and assignments completed. Additionally, the results demonstrate a need to better understand how teachers' personal and professional experiences are influencing their beliefs, knowledge, and practices. Although some studies have discussed these areas of experience as influential in teachers' work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds (Bernhard et al., 1995; Castro, 2010; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Lee & Dallman, 2008), the relationships among teachers' personal and professional experiences and their understandings of children from diverse cultures were not the focal points of these studies. As the field works to improve teachers' preparation for their work with diverse groups of children, it is necessary that future research ask more comprehensive questions about from where are they gaining experiences, what they are learning from these experiences, and how they are guided in their reflections on these experiences. Within these examinations of the origins of teachers' beliefs and knowledge, it will be important to include macrosystem influences such as historical events (e.g., desegregation, civil rights movements), socio-cultural attitudes (e.g., color-blind perspectives, White privilege and bias), and institutional acts (e.g., immigrant legislation, educational acts and reform). Although the research questions from this study were not focused specifically on macrosystem effects on teachers' work, the findings demonstrated that these broader sociohistorical factors may influence teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices with children from diverse cultural

backgrounds. In future research, these influences may be captured through quantitative measures such as surveys regarding participants' experiences or awareness of macrosystem events, or through qualitative interviews of teachers' perceptions regarding how these events have affected their work.

### **Surface Level of Understanding Culture**

Finally, in both the quantitative and qualitative data, there is evidence that most teachers are only scratching the surface when it comes to teaching in a culturally responsive manner. Although the quantitative findings do demonstrate that, on average, teachers reported positive beliefs, adequate knowledge, and frequent pedagogical adaptations concerning multicultural classrooms, many of the items on the surveys did not address culture in a detailed way. For example, in the TMAS which measured teachers' beliefs, items such as "I find teaching a culturally diverse group of children rewarding", "regardless of the racial and ethnic makeup of my class, it is important for all children to be aware of multicultural diversity", and "I can learn a great deal from children and families who have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds", may not capture deeply entrenched, negative perspectives of diverse populations. None of the questions dealt with specific cultures like the Latino population which the quantitative findings suggested there is a bias against. Similarly, many of the items on the EIEC Checklist remain at the surface level of cultural inclusion. Examples of these items are: "I display pictures, posters, and other materials that reflect the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of children and families served in my early childhood program", and "I play



a variety of music and introduce musical instruments from many cultures”. Only a few items on the scale required teachers to change their interactions with or responses to children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, teachers may be able to include these surface aspects of culture on a more frequent basis than they implement pedagogical adaptations that reflect more hidden elements of children’s cultures.

In the qualitative interviews, there were multiple themes that demonstrated a superficial understanding of culture. When teachers discussed children’s differences it was often in terms of language, foods, or holidays. The teachers mentioned these same aspects of culture when talking about the ways in which they incorporated culture in to the classroom. Finally, teachers’ educational experiences emphasized only these observable aspects of culture. None of the teachers articulated that courses on culture helped them to reflect upon their own biases and understand culture in a deeper way. Instead, the teachers’ expressed that culture was discussed in a cursory manner. Thus, teachers were admonished to learn about diverse cultures and ways to include different groups of children in the classroom, but they were not always provided with meaningful learning opportunities to do so.

Theoretical and empirical work on superficial understandings of culture has demonstrated that children from diverse cultures experience negative interactions in the classroom when teachers understand culture on the surface level (Gay, 2000; Weaver, 2003). As Weaver stated, “unless we can understand internal [in-depth] culture, we will mistakenly evaluate behavior based on our own cultural experiences” (p. 379). Therefore, teachers who have simplistic perspectives of culture are unable to appreciate and

encourage children's behavioral differences and instead operate from a deficit model in which children and families from diverse cultures are considered "good" only if they are able to assimilate to (White) American ways of behaving in the classroom (Castro, 2010; Gay; Weaver). Furthermore, teachers who understand culture on a surface level are less able to reflect upon institutional forms of discrimination against cultural groups and then cannot challenge the status quo within early childhood classrooms (Castro; Derman-Sparks & Brunson Phillips, 1997). Teachers need to be given opportunities to learn about and experience culture on a deeper level, as well as receive on-going support to change the ways they incorporate culture into the classroom.

### **Dissimilarities**

Despite the similarities in the quantitative and qualitative findings, there were a few places in which the results from one method diverged from the other. These differences were seen primarily in relation to teachers' biases towards diverse groups of children and in the level of detail regarding teachers' educational, personal, and professional experiences.

### **Cultural and Linguistic Bias**

In particular, the quantitative data indicated that teachers who had a higher percentage of children from Latino backgrounds in their classrooms held less positive beliefs about multicultural education. Further, teachers' beliefs were not related quantitatively to the percentage of children who spoke Spanish. Thus, there is evidence that a bias exists for

Latino children regardless of what language they spoke. Although there were statements from the qualitative interviews that suggested teachers have negative perceptions of children who are culturally and linguistically diverse, a specific bias against Latino children was not present in the data. Rather, there was a bias against children who spoke a different language than English. Many of the teachers expressed that language barriers were their primary challenges in a multicultural classroom, and several teachers mentioned that they would need to “downsize” their teaching in order to accommodate children who spoke different languages. Thus, the data from the quantitative and qualitative components demonstrate oppositional findings; in one method, ethnicity, but not language is related to teachers’ beliefs and practices, and in the other, language was identified as the main difficulty for teachers in their work. Though the methodologies indicated distinct forms of bias in the participating teachers, both the quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate the need to address teacher bias in its various manifestations (i.e., race, ethnicity, culture, language, etc.) (Okagaki & Diamond, 2003). As discussed earlier, the bias against Latino children and children who speak languages other than English may be stereotyped negatively in the larger society of the United States. Unfortunately, the Latino population in this nation, including the variations within this ethnic group and the ways in which they may experience discrimination in the early care and education system, are under-researched (Dovidio et al., 2010). More information is needed to uncover the origin of teachers’ biases against Latino children and children who speak languages other than English.

## **Use of Findings**

The other major difference between the quantitative and qualitative methodologies is how the findings may be used. Quantitative data is often limited in the depth of information it can provide on the constructs of interests. However, quantitative methods do allow for testing theoretical and hypothesized relationships among constructs. In this study, the quantitative results demonstrate important links among teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices, which can be generalized to other preschool teachers across North Carolina. Specifically, the findings may be used to highlight the need to address teachers' beliefs and knowledge concerning children from culturally diverse backgrounds more directly in teacher preparation programs. As discussed earlier, the quantitative results also indicated a bias towards children from Latino backgrounds. For North Carolina in particular, this finding emphasizes the need to help teachers identify and understand negative stereotypes they may hold of Latino children and families, especially as the Latino population increases in the state.

The qualitative data from this study are better able to supply detailed information on the context of teachers' educational experiences, as well as the professional and personal experiences that have also shaped the participating teachers. In the qualitative findings, we see that teachers' have not had consistent or in-depth exposure to culturally responsive teaching theory or methods. Additionally, the teachers articulated that their personal and professional experiences with children from diverse cultural groups were powerful influences for their beliefs, knowledge, and practices. These findings suggest that teachers may need frequent, positive interactions with diverse cultural groups and

support in reflecting upon such interactions in order for them to make real, lasting changes in their perspectives and their classrooms. It makes sense, then, that the quantitative measure of teachers' education and experience were unable to capture the complexities of teachers' educational experiences and other factors that may help explain some of the variation within teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices. The dissimilarities in the results from this study actually demonstrate how quantitative and qualitative methods and findings can work together to provide a richer understanding of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2005; Todd et al., 2004). In this study, the quantitative data provides information on specific relationships that can be generalized to other preschool teachers, whereas the qualitative data offers a detailed picture of how teachers' perceive and work with children and families from diverse cultural groups.

### **Implications for Teacher Preparation**

Both the quantitative and qualitative findings from this study point to the need for a revision of early childhood teacher preparation programs at both 2-year and 4-year institutions. Currently, many teachers are not having the kinds of educational experiences that may help them shift their paradigms of teaching to become more culturally responsive. Thus, teachers are left with surface level understandings of culture and how to teach children from different cultural backgrounds. Culturally and linguistically diverse children may be marginalized further in the classroom, which can lead to negative developmental outcomes for these children including insecurity about their cultural

identities (Gay, 2000; Sturm, 2003). As the findings from this study show, this re-conceptualization of teacher preparation programs should include a specific emphasis on teachers' professional and personal experiences, as well as provide opportunities for teachers to examine culture in a more comprehensive manner.

In such revisions, teacher preparation programs should also take into consideration the delicate matter of inquiring into and potentially changing teachers' beliefs. Although previous research has demonstrated some success in shaping teachers' beliefs (Kidd et al., 2008; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Milner, 2005; Recchia et al., 2009), most theoretical and empirical work on teachers' beliefs indicates that this process is difficult (Bandura, 1989; Pajares, 1992). Teachers' beliefs are developed from a combination of personal, professional, and educational experiences, as well as the larger historical and cultural contexts of those experiences. Furthermore, belief systems are often tied to intrapersonal and interpersonal identity, and are therefore often deeply entrenched within an individual (Bandura; Pajares). It may be useful for faculty and others involved in re-conceptualizations of teacher preparation programs to remember that teachers may make changes in small increments at differing paces and through unique pathways (Dooley, 2008). Derman-Sparks and Brunson Phillips suggest that helping teachers become more culturally responsive is viewed as a process in which a degree program is just the first part. As they stated, "education is not an end in itself, but rather the beginning approach to thinking, feeling, and acting" (p. 10). Thus, in this process of "becoming multicultural" (Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Clark, 2007, p. 288) and discovering ways to incorporate children from culturally diverse backgrounds in the classroom, it is important to keep in mind that

change may be difficult, and that teachers need guidance and support educationally, professionally, and even personally. Teachers need multiple opportunities to reflect upon themselves and their learning, as well as meaningful “encounters” with people who are different than them in order to begin this paradigm shift towards deeper cultural understandings.

### **Recommendations**

Middleton (2002) suggests four components necessary to create positive, transformational education experiences for teachers. These include the teaching approach, the authenticity of teacher educators and students, a growing awareness of self and others, and an element of ethical accountability to act in the best interests of ALL teachers and children. Using this framework and the findings from this study, I recommended the following changes and considerations for early childhood care and education teacher preparation programs. In this discussion it is important to remember that, “teachers’ resistance to teaching for diversity has different sources, and should not be treated as a single, unified phenomenon” (Lukyx et al., 2005, p. 138). Instead, teacher educators should use a variety of theoretical and pedagogical approaches to engage teachers in the work of reflecting upon and changing their understandings and practices.

**Recommendation One.** Explicitly challenge students to reflect upon their personal beliefs regarding concepts such as culture, language, diversity, oppression, privilege, and epistemology.

According to Cannella (1997), the current ECCE system, including teacher preparation, is rooted in the Western, ontological perspective that there exists an absolute truth and knowledge about the world. From this worldview, knowledge about child development is thought to be independent of human construction, universal to all children, and free of personal values and ideologies. Cannella, however, points out the dynamic, constructed nature of reality and knowledge, especially knowledge regarding child development. She further outlines how the reliance on a rigid, universal ontological and epistemological position functions to create “power relations that foster injustice, oppression, and regulation” (p. 157) of diverse groups of children and families. As noted earlier, when culture and various forms of discrimination are not discussed in an explicit manner, teachers are less likely to engage in the process of examining and changing their beliefs and practices. Thus, I think the primary recommendation for teacher preparation programs is to include in all courses foundational understandings of the constructed nature of knowledge, truth, and social and cultural norms. Teachers cannot fully understand how power, privilege, and oppression operate within ECCE if discussion of these concepts is not explicit and grounded in dialogue about the nature of human knowledge (Cannella). It could be important for teachers to begin their educational training with an anti-bias course that will help teachers explore these concepts and transform their perspectives before including the application of these concepts in courses on child development and teaching methods (Derman-Sparks & Brunson Phillips, 1997).

Other scholars have also outlined how many current early childhood practices are based upon European American expectations of how children and families should behave



and interact in the classroom (Derman-Sparks & Brunson Phillips, 1997; Okagaki & Diamond, 2003). The findings from this study also demonstrated that teachers have a superficial understanding of culture and are not aware of the ways in which they are currently excluding children from the classroom. Therefore, in discussions and assignments related to oppression and privilege in diversity, teachers' beliefs and current understandings of "appropriate" practices need to be challenged explicitly. Hoy and colleagues (2006) identified four types of beliefs that teachers may hold that can act as a barrier to change. First is "optimistic individualism" (p. 719), or the belief that any individual can work hard enough to overcome difficulty and achieve optimal outcomes. Second, the authors discussed "absolute democracy" or the belief that regardless of cultural or linguistic background, "the same good pedagogy and decision making will work for all" (p. 719). Similarly, "naïve egalitarianism" (p. 719) is the perspective that everyone is equal, and to be egalitarian teachers must interact with all children in exactly the same way despite children's sociocultural differences. Finally, the fourth kind of belief is that of colorblindness. Such perspectives fail to acknowledge children as situated within a sociocultural context which influences their ways of knowing, learning, and interacting with the world (Milner, 2005). These beliefs also exclude diverse children because they do not recognize the systematic obstacles and oppressive forces that diverse children face in trying to succeed in school (Gay, 2000). As evidenced in the qualitative findings, teachers who hold these various beliefs think that they are being open to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, in reality, they are ignoring the distinctions among children's needs, interests, cultural strengths, and identities that

children may bring to the classroom (Hoy et al.). Therefore, these explicit discussions of culture must address culture in a more detailed and comprehensive manner (Weaver, 2000). Moreover, teachers' internal contradictions or tensions should also be addressed in these discussions.

**Recommendation Two.** Teacher educators should create an environment in which all students feel welcome by using a relational approach which appreciates teachers' individual strengths, including their own experiences, interests, and cultural capital.

Several studies have noted that teachers are fearful of expressing certain questions or beliefs for fear of creating controversy (Bernhard et al., 1995; Van Hook, 2002). If teachers do not feel safe to express their thoughts and beliefs, especially those that may be interpreted as offensive, then teachers may experience difficulty identifying, processing, and changing their beliefs and practices. Other scholars have emphasized the importance of creating a classroom atmosphere in which there is room for disagreement and respectful dialogue of differing opinions (Baum & King, 2006; Cannella, 1997; Noddings, 2002). As evidenced in the qualitative findings, open class discussion was a meaningful teaching approach for many of the participating teachers. Teacher educators need to create an environment in which teachers feel safe to express their opinions and give voice to their experiences. Such an environment is fostered through an atmosphere in which respectful inquiry is the primary method of understanding others' points of view (Hoy et al.).

Additionally, Middleton (2002) suggested that class members construct ground rules for classes at the beginning of each semester. These rules should not only ensure the

environment is non-threatening, but also encourage collaboration in creating new understandings, especially as teachers process their differing perspectives. According to Baum and King (2006), safe environments are also created through giving attention to teachers' individual identities including their age, interests, culture, and overall development. Teacher educators need to take the time to get to know teachers and learn how to support them individually and collectively through their learning. The authors also suggest using class time for individual meetings, having students complete and share autobiographies, and openly communicating personal struggles as a teacher educator. The additional time spent on the creation of relationships will help teachers to feel valued and establish feelings of trust toward their instructors (Baum & King; Noddings, 2002). The teachers in this study repeatedly remarked that the relationships with their college instructors were important sources of encouragement and support in the hard work of learning. When teachers feel that they are cared for on a personal level, they are more motivated to learn and can then safely approach the examination of their personal and professional beliefs and ideologies (Ginsberg & Wladkowski, 2009).

**Recommendation Three.** Provide teachers with multiple opportunities to examine their personal and professional experiences, allowing teachers time to conduct their own explorations and make their own conclusions.

The findings from this study suggest that teachers are more engaged in their learning when given the chance to reflect upon their actual experiences and to participate in different kinds of learning activities. Previous work shows that there are several constructivist teaching approaches that have helped teachers reflect on their experiences,

beliefs, and knowledge (Brookes & Brookes, 1993). These included: readings regarding critical theory and research, written reflections such as autobiography, journals, and reaction papers, classroom activities and dialogue that addressed cultural and linguistic stereotypes, creating and implementing activity plans, service learning opportunities, student teaching and practica hours, and personal experiences with families from diverse backgrounds (Gay & Howard, 2000; Kidd et al., 2008; Kyles & Olafson, 2008; Lim & Able-Boone, 2005; Milner, 2005; Recchia et al., 2009). Across the studies, many teachers who engaged in these assignments expressed that these learning opportunities helped them examine and change their beliefs (and at times their practices). Although the teachers in this study were not frequently given these opportunities in relation to children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, they articulated that having hands-on activities and chances to reflect upon their learning were helpful teaching approaches in other courses. It is important that teachers are not only provided with such learning opportunities in their classes on general child development or children with disabilities, but that they are allowed to engage in these activities in courses about culture and diversity.

Previous research also demonstrated that the lack of change in teachers' beliefs and practices was likely due to limited opportunities to participate in these constructivist learning opportunities. For example, when courses including only journaling or practica hours, but not several, integrated opportunities for teachers to inquire about and reflect on their beliefs, there was less change in their understandings about cultural diversity (Kyles & Olafson, 2008; Milner, 2005). Teachers need to be exposed to multiple, on-going

assignments, discussions, and lessons regarding diversity (Lukyx et al., 2005; Hoy et al., 2006). Furthermore, Middleton (2002) noted that because of the personal nature of the change process, teachers needed time to struggle with information and reflect upon their own experiences. In her study, teachers often responded negatively to diversity issues when they felt pushed to believe something or come to a conclusion too quickly. One component of having realistic expectations about the change process (Dooley, 2008) is to provide teachers adequate time to investigate and dialogue about multiple perspectives on a particular issue. Having time allows teachers to make their own conclusions regarding their beliefs instead of accepting someone else's position uncritically (Baum & King, 2006).

**Recommendation Four.** Make authentic experiences with individuals from diverse backgrounds the foundation of course assignments and dialogue. Learning experiences need to be relevant to teachers' professional work and provide them with knowledge and skills to use in their careers.

Several studies have documented that teachers do not feel prepared to work with diverse children and families (Early & Winton, 2001; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). The findings from this study corroborated the results from previous research. Additionally, in the diversity workshops conducted by Lee and colleagues (2007), teachers expressed that although they felt diversity issues were important to incorporate in classrooms, they still did not have adequate knowledge on how to do so. In the current study teachers' knowledge, but not beliefs was a significant predictor of teachers' practices. Overall, the results from these studies suggest that teachers are not having the educational experiences

that teach them to apply their learning in their professional environments. It is important to include not only theoretical discussions on diversity in teacher preparation courses, but also to provide concrete ways through which teachers can practice applying their skills. Teacher preparation programs commonly include practica or service-learning experiences as a component of their curriculum; however, it is not always required that these experiences include culturally and linguistically diverse children and families (Early & Winton). Teachers need to have personal and professional learning experiences to learn how to respectfully engage with real children and families. Within these practica experiences, it is essential that teachers are able to see culturally responsive practices modeled and discussed openly. They also need to be given opportunities to reflect upon these experiences, either in writing or through group/class discussion (Kidd et al., 2008).

Moreover, teachers in this study expressed some difficulty interacting with families from diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus, it is crucial that teacher preparation programs provide hands-on, practical experiences in communication skills, problem solving, and conflict resolution, especially when working with families and colleagues from different backgrounds (Bernhard et al., 1995; Gay & Howard, 2000). Some successful methods have been internships with diverse families, interacting with panels of diverse families, and group discussions after practica experiences (Baum & Swick, 2008; Kidd et al., 2008). Derman-Sparks and Brunson Phillips (1997) offer several specific activities that may help teachers discover areas of bias and begin the change process to become culturally responsive teachers. These activities start with reflections on individual experiences (e.g., autobiography, cultural identities, and cultural conflicts), then move

towards abstract understandings of institutional oppressions (e.g., finding examples of racism within curriculum, using films that explore forms of discrimination), and end with engaging in practical application of pedagogical change (e.g., action project). Whatever the method, it is important that teacher preparation programs provide opportunities for teachers to gain practical skills for working with diverse children and families.

**Recommendation Five.** Incorporate information regarding diversity in every class, regardless of subject matter or standard curriculum. Diversity issues should not be covered in only one course for one semester.

In the current study, if culture was included in teachers' college courses, this exposure was limited to one course or a few lessons within one course. The only teacher to express that she had multiple courses that discussed culture was Krystal; however, her degree was in Human Services and not Early Childhood Education. Several studies have shown that teachers who resisted incorporating diversity issues in their classrooms often felt that culture was irrelevant to children's learning, especially when teaching particular subjects such as mathematics or science (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Lukyx et al., 2005). Although the teachers in the current study did not express that they felt that culture was irrelevant to these subjects, they did note that they only knew how to incorporate different cultures into a few areas of the classroom (e.g., dramatic play, books, and art). There was little connection to other curricular areas in the classroom or to children's overall development. Teachers need to understand that all subject matter is constructed knowledge, and that differing cultural practices do influence how these subjects are taught and understood (Lee et al., 2007; Lukyx et al.). Therefore, teacher educators need

to include discussions and assignments on diversity in all courses whether they are content area courses, family courses, or administrative courses (Bernhard et al.). Furthermore, in previous work, teachers expressed that having to follow a standard curriculum prevented them from including issues of diversity (Van Hook, 2002). As some teachers will work at centers or schools that have less flexible curricula, teachers need to be prepared with skills to identify ways in which they can incorporate diversity into any curriculum.

**Recommendation Six.** Increase the capacity of teacher preparation institutions to meet the educational needs of teachers as they work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Unfortunately, racism and other forms of discrimination can be present among faculty members (Bernhard et al., 1995; Delpit, 1996; Derman-Sparks & Brunson Phillips, 2000; Lubeck, 1996). Just as teachers are encouraged to continue their learning and reflection after class is complete, teacher educators need opportunities for regular training in which they are also encouraged to understand diversity on a deeper level and reflect on their own prejudices, challenges, and classroom practices (Maude et al., 2010). Such training should include opportunities for faculty to reflect upon their own biases and challenges, as well as allow teacher educators to model how to engage in on-going learning and professional development (Baum & King, 2006). The participants in this study did not specifically articulate that their instructors did not utilize culturally relevant teaching approaches. However, most of the teachers did discuss that there was little inclusion of culture in their college courses. Continued education for faculty members may be an



important way to encourage change in teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices with children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Moreover, as current demographics demonstrate, ECCE faculty across the nation are predominantly White, middle-class, females (Gay & Howard, 2000; Taylor & Sobel, 2001). Although the teachers in this study did mention a few teachers who were not White, efforts need to be made on the part of universities, departments, and individual faculty to recruit and retain diverse faculty (Early & Winton, 2001). As the cultural and linguistic diversity of faculty increase, it will also be important for White faculty to remain open to learning and changing their understandings and practices based upon the intercultural exchanges with new faculty (Cannella, 1997; Delpit, 1996). Such a willingness to learn from others will be important in creating a positive, multicultural climate within teacher preparation departments and programs. Finally, as little is known about why there is a lack of diverse teachers and faculty, more research is needed to understand ways to encourage more cultural and linguistic diversity in teacher preparation programs.

**Recommendation Seven.** Base classroom experiences and discussions in the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC's) professional standards and ethical code for working with children and families. Hold students accountable for how their beliefs and practices may affect diverse children and their families.

This recommendation does not reflect a specific theme or finding within the qualitative or quantitative data. However, it is important to mention because utilizing an

ethical code of conduct within the college classroom helps to remind teachers that they are professionals and that their practices should reflect the ethical standards of their work. The National Association for the Education of Young Children has created several standards in regards to teachers' competencies for working with children and families. Among these standards is the ability to value and build relationships with children and families and to use ethical principles such as not harming children (Hyson & Biggar, 2006). Though it is important for teacher educators to provide teachers space and time to explore their own beliefs and understandings (Baum & Swick, 2008), teacher educators also have a responsibility to ensure that teachers are able to provide care that is best for young children. This includes using NAEYC's standards and ethical code as a foundation for assignments, course content, classroom discussion, and student evaluation. When teachers are having difficulty processing a specific issue, teacher educators can refer to these codes and standards to guide them through their decision-making. As teachers explore their beliefs and practices, they need to be reminded that in the end they are learning to create welcoming, safe learning environments that will provide meaningful opportunities for *all* children and families (Hyson & Biggar).

**Recommendation Eight.** Provide teachers with mentoring (or induction programs) and other forms of professional support as they work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

As the results from the qualitative portion of the study demonstrated, teachers felt that their professional experiences with children from diverse cultural groups were salient for their current work. Additionally, they discussed how they benefited from connections to

co-workers with knowledge of diverse cultures and access to support and resources regarding multicultural classrooms. These findings suggest that mentoring relationships with teachers who have more experience in providing culturally relevant practices may be a meaningful way to support teachers in changing their classroom practices to incorporate all children in the classroom. Previous research has demonstrated that teachers often benefit from positive, professional relationships in which they are able to reflect upon their practices and learn how to create change in the classroom (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Martin & Trueax, 1997; Silva & Tom, 2001). However, this theoretical and empirical work on mentoring has focused on teachers' overall work with young children rather than emphasizing how teachers are responding to children from diverse cultures. Connecting teachers to mentors, induction programs, and other forms of support (such as education coordinators, resource materials, and reflection groups) may be an intentional way to provide teachers with the professional experiences that give them concrete ways to understand children's cultures and implement practices that are more culturally relevant for the children in their classrooms.

### **Implications for Early Childhood Policy**

Based on the results of this study, teachers in North Carolina are in need of educational and professional support to better incorporate children from diverse cultural backgrounds into their classrooms. There are two specific ways in which state policy makers could encourage teachers to become more culturally responsive in their teaching;

both of these methods would hopefully promote teacher professional development in relation to diversity. The first is to include diversity training or courses as a component of teachers' professional licenses. Currently, a 4-year degree from an accredited university is required to obtain a teaching license within North Carolina (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). However, the state does not mandate diversity courses for teachers working towards a license. Though such classes and knowledge are valued in professional standards for North Carolina teachers, there are not particular diversity courses teachers must take. If the state required courses on working with children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as a part of licensing, this might encourage universities to offer such courses. Moreover, directors and principals who are hiring teachers may begin to look for these qualifications in their teachers, thereby making cultural competence a desirable professional quality in early childhood teachers. This latter implication may be especially important for teachers who complete an associate's degree or are not on the path to licensure.

In addition, many states across the nation have Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) that are designed to monitor and improve quality in child care environments. In North Carolina and other states, only global classroom quality is assessed and used to rate programs (Child Trends & Mathematica, 2010). However, there are other aspects of classroom quality, such as responsiveness to cultural and linguistic diversity that are important for children's learning (Layzer & Goodson, 2006). Thus, state administrators and policy makers could work to include measures of culturally responsive teaching in their systems of accountability and improvement. If this aspect of quality

were to be included in QRIS, it may encourage directors and teachers to put more emphasis on cultural diversity in their programs. This may also increase opportunities for centers to receive technical assistance in adapting their practices to include all children more fully. NAEYC is currently working with a few states to pilot a set of cultural competency benchmarks as a component of QRIS (Deborah Cassidy, personal communication, October, 2010). It will be important for policy makers to investigate the success of these pilot endeavors and strive to include such aspects of quality in their current monitoring systems.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

All research has advantages and disadvantages according to the selected methodology and procedures, as well as the situation in which the research is conducted. For this particular study, the strengths include the timeliness of the topics and the use of mixed methods. There is a great need for more research in the areas of teacher preparation and work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Professional organizations such as NAEYC and NCATE have called for more culturally competent teachers, and scholars and practitioners are beginning to explore these phenomena in more depth (Hyson & Biggar, 2006; Ponterotto et al., 2003). As the number of children from diverse cultural backgrounds increases, it is imperative that teachers are prepared fully to work with these groups of children. Thus, this work contributes to the early childhood field by providing information on what teachers believe, know, and practice in relation to children from

culturally diverse backgrounds. Additionally, the findings from this study have important implications for teacher preparation and early childhood education policy.

Further, the use of mixed methods in this study may result in richer understandings of preschool teachers across the state of North Carolina. The combination of general and specific information on teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices provides a more comprehensive picture of teachers and their work with diverse groups of children. As noted earlier, the quantitative findings contribute to the field by demonstrating that teachers' knowledge is an important predictor of their practices and that teachers' beliefs may influence their knowledge. Thus, all of these constructs are needed to gain a complete understanding of teachers' work with children from different cultures. The qualitative findings demonstrate the areas in which teacher preparation programs can better serve teachers and provide meaningful learning opportunities to shape their work in multicultural classrooms. Both perspectives may also guide future research in different, but equally important ways.

Conversely, the limitations of the current study are primarily measurement issues. First, the measure of teachers' and children's cultural background is incomplete. Specifically, these variables were assessed by asking teachers to identify the ethnicity and home language of themselves and the children in their classrooms. As the definition of culture includes people's daily practices, customs, and worldviews, in addition to their racial, ethnic, and linguistic identity, the current measurement of culture falls short. Therefore, this study lacks detailed information on participants' cultures. Similarly, children's race and language only serve as a proxy for understanding their culture.

Obtaining detailed information about children's cultures was beyond the scope of this study, but should be addressed more directly in future work.

Additionally, although the measurements of materials/classroom structure, teacher-child interactions, and instructional activities (e.g., ECERS-R, CLASS Pre-K, and ECERS-E) are established, validated instruments, there is little evidence that these measures accurately capture the quality of classroom practices in culturally diverse contexts. For example, the ECERS-R is a tool that measures global, classroom quality and includes items regarding space, furniture, health and safety, classroom materials, and teacher-child language and interactions (Cassidy et al., 2005). Although there are a few indicators that require the presence of materials such as books, pictures, and toys that reflect different kinds of people in a positive light, this is not a specific focal point of the measure and could not be tested with the current data. Furthermore, the CLASS is a measure of process quality in the classroom and captures the ways in which teachers create a positive emotional climate, support children's cognitive and language development, and guide children as they develop positive social skills and learn to manage their behavior (Pianta et al., 2004). This instrument was not designed to assess teachers' adaptations based upon cultural customs or behaviors, though it does measure teachers' overall responsiveness and sensitivity to children's needs.

Finally, the ECERS-E scale is intended to measure four specific curricular elements of the classroom: literacy, math, science, and diversity (Sylva et al., 2006). In the first three subscales, the items focus on what materials, activities, and interactions are occurring in the classroom to promote children's cognitive development in that particular

subject area. The diversity subscale does capture the presence of diverse materials in terms of both gender and racial diversity, but still lacks items that assess adaptations teachers may or may not make based on differing cultural behaviors or expectations for the children. (Regressions were run using this subscale as a dependent variable; however the relationships were not significant. The t-value for teachers' beliefs was  $-.664$  ( $p = .511$ ), and the t-value for teachers' knowledge was  $-.111$  ( $p = .912$ )). Nevertheless, these instruments were chosen because of their use in previous research, the lack of other observational tools to measure teachers' cultural competence, and the logistic and time constraints of observing these teachers on additional measures. It is difficult then to make conclusive statements about the relationships among teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices when the instruments measuring classroom practices did not align with the constructs of beliefs and knowledge.

Similarly, although the survey tools did provide important information on the relationship among teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and pedagogical adaptations to their classrooms, these tools also have their own set of limitations. First, as with any form of self-report, participants may wish to be perceived as having socially desirable qualities. In this study, teachers may have felt that they would be viewed in a negative light if they reported having discriminatory beliefs, less knowledge, or implementing fewer practices concerning diverse groups of children. Second, as discussed earlier, some of the items on the survey measures addressed culture on the same superficial level that teachers discussed in the qualitative interviews. It may be easy to "strongly agree" with such questions as "I find teaching a group of culturally diverse children rewarding" and still



only understand a culture by its observable components. Similarly, some of the items measuring teachers' practices may be done frequently, but still only be a surface level change. Although it is important to represent different cultures in classroom materials such as books and pictures, doing so does not guarantee that the use of materials or interactions in the classroom will be culturally responsive (as seen in the qualitative data). Therefore, it is difficult to assess the depth of teachers' understandings of culture and how these perspectives may influence their teaching.

Moreover, the quantitative portion of the study is cross-sectional and does not provide information about causal links among the constructs. Additionally, the qualitative part asks teachers to reflect retrospectively on their education experiences, some of which began over 10 years ago. Thus, the focus of the project was more exploratory than explanatory; the ultimate goal was to understand more about the primary constructs and the relationships among them rather than explain the causes of teachers' practices or most effective strategies for professional development. Hopefully, future examinations can build on this study by using the new conceptual framework (see Figure 2) to guide the selection of constructs and methods. For the quantitative portion of the study, the sample was relatively small. Although there was a high response rate (60.3%) among the teachers surveyed, there was still not enough power to obtain significance for small effect sizes. Thus, it will be important for future work to include more teachers as participants. Finally, the last limitation deals with my emerging ability to conduct in-depth interviews. After reviewing the transcripts, there were many places in which I could have expanded or asked follow-up questions that would have provided more detail regarding teachers'

beliefs, knowledge, and practices in their classrooms, as well as their personal, professional, and educational experiences.

### **Future Directions**

Before discussing the ways in which this study can shape future work in the field of teacher preparation, it is important to reflect upon how the conceptual framework for this study changed as a result of the research process. As seen in Figure 1, it was originally thought that teachers' educational experiences would be more influential to teachers' work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. However, the findings do not support such a strong connection between teachers' education and their beliefs, knowledge, and practices. The new conceptual framework (Figure 2) better reflects the results from the current study. Specifically, teachers' personal and professional experiences are now included in the model as teachers' interviews highlighted the significance of these experiences. Teachers' educational, personal, and professional experiences are thus depicted as working together to shape teachers' characteristics (which include their beliefs, knowledge, and practices). Although these experiences can sometimes be discussed separately, the connections among teachers' experiences were also identified as important influences in teachers work with multicultural groups of children. Future research may benefit from the use of this conceptual model, especially if the goal of such work is to understand the interactive nature among teachers' experiences and how the combination of these shape early childhood teaching.

Beyond the use of this conceptual framework, there are five primary ways in which future research can add upon the current study. First, although this study provides some information on teachers' knowledge and how it is related to teachers' beliefs and practices, the overall understanding of this construct is still limited. There is little previous work on specific components of teachers' knowledge and almost nothing on how teachers have gained such knowledge or how they utilize their knowledge to make decisions in the classroom. As teachers' knowledge was the only predictor of teachers' reported practices, it is important that this construct becomes better understood. Investigating teacher knowledge in more depth may provide vital information for teacher preparation programs on what content to include in teachers' courses. Similarly, there was some indication from the qualitative findings that constructs such as center support or teachers' self-efficacy in their knowledge and skills may be related to teachers' knowledge and practices. Such constructs should be included in future research.

The second direction for future research is improving the measurement of culture and culturally responsive teaching in early childhood classrooms. Some of the measures included in this study may not have been the most appropriate methods for capturing these constructs. When methods do not align specifically with the constructs of interest, the conclusions of a study will need to be interpreted with caution (Shadish et al, 2002). Future research is needed to pilot measures that will assess children's culture and teachers' subsequent pedagogical adaptations in a more accurate manner. Similarly, the third suggestion for future research will help to make the conclusions made in this study more generalizable. Specifically, as this study had a small sample size and included only

preschool teachers, future work should be completed with larger sample sizes and include teachers of other age groups. It is important for scholars and practitioners to understand if these findings are supported in studies with samples that represent more teachers.

Fourth, a large portion of the qualitative interviews asked teachers to reflect retrospectively on their educational, personal, and professional experiences. Although teachers' perceptions of these past experiences can be important to their work, the information gained through the interview does not capture teachers' learning experiences while in their college courses. It may be that there was more discussion on culture in teachers' college classrooms, but they are unable to remember all of the details of these experiences. In order to learn more about the learning processes of teachers and how to adapt teacher preparation to maximize their learning, it is essential that future research follow students through their preparation programs. Furthermore, as the questions in the qualitative interviews emphasized teachers' educational experiences, it may also be important that future studies observe teachers in their work settings and interview them in-depth about their professional and personal experiences so that all components of the conceptual framework are included. Quantitatively, this work may include methods such as Q-sorts, surveys, and structured observations; qualitatively, ethnography or case study may be appropriate ways to investigate such a phenomenon.

Finally, this study offers limited information on what deep understandings of children's cultures and culturally relevant pedagogical adaptations look like in the classroom. Although previous theoretical work has highlighted the importance of becoming more culturally relevant (Gay, 2000), there is increasing need for practical

strategies and supports for early childhood teachers. Some of this practical information is beginning to emerge from the field of ECCE in the form of anti-bias curriculum (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010) and cultural competency benchmarks and self-assessment tools (Hepburn, 2004; NAEYC, 2009). Nevertheless, there needs to be more empirical work on how teachers actually implement culturally relevant pedagogy and ways to identify successful strategies that can be passed onto other teachers and classrooms. It may also be important for this work to be linked to children's developmental outcomes so researchers and practitioners can understand which pedagogical adaptations and teaching methods are most meaningful and appropriate for young children from diverse cultures.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the limitations in this study, there is evidence that work on teacher preparation for work with children from culturally diverse backgrounds is critical (Castro, 2010; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). As Derman-Sparks and Brunson Phillips (1997) discuss, there exists a kind of “cultural racism” in early childhood classrooms. Specifically, “cultural racism consists of the beliefs, symbols, and underlying cultural rules of behavior that teach and endorse the superiority of the dominant [European] American culture” (p. 10). When teachers are not encouraged to examine how their beliefs, knowledge, and practices may maintain this type of discrimination, children become excluded from or ignored in their classrooms (Weaver, 2000). Given the

increasing number of children from culturally diverse backgrounds in ECCE settings, it is essential that scholars, teacher educators, practitioners, and policy makers work together to improve teachers' practices with children from diverse cultural groups. Although this work will take "confidence, patience, and persistence to challenge, interrupt, modify, erode, and eliminate any and all manifestations of [cultural] racism" (Derman-Sparks & Brunson Phillips, p. 3), it is necessary to better prepare ECCE professionals and ensure that the needs of all children are met.

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## APPENDIX A

### LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROBES

#### Rapport/getting to know the participant

1. Tell me a little bit about your personal background.
  - a. Where did you grow up?
  - b. Can you tell me about a childhood tradition or family ritual that was important for you growing up?
    - i. What do you think this tradition or ritual taught you?
  - c. [I will give brief definition of culture: Set of beliefs, customs, values of a people group] What is your earliest memory of culture?
  - d. Did you interact with people who are different than you and your family?
    - i. Can you describe how they were different (had different traditions or rituals)?
    - ii. What did you learn from interacting with people who were different than you?
    - iii. How did this affect you?

#### Questions about classroom practices / professional experiences

1. How long have you been teaching in early childhood education?
  - a. What ages have you taught?
  - b. Thinking about the different groups of children you have taught, could you tell me a little bit about their different cultural backgrounds? [What were the cultural compositions of these groups of children?]
2. Tell me about your earliest experience having a child from a different cultural background in your classroom.
  - a. What was difficult about that situation? What was rewarding?
  - b. How do you think that has prepared you to work with other diverse children?
3. Tell me about a child currently in your classroom who is from different cultural background than you.
4. So with this child (named in Question 1 above), can you describe a time that you had to make changes in the classroom to include the child/reflect the child's differences?
  - a. How often do you need to make such changes?
  - b. How do you decide what changes to make?
  - c. How does this affect your daily teaching practices?
5. How do you feel about having children from culturally diverse backgrounds in your class?
  - a. What are the rewards and challenges for working with these groups of children?

6. Tell me about why you think getting to know a child is helpful for your teaching.
7. Tell me about a family in your classroom who are from different cultural background(s) than you.
  - a. How do you work with those families?
  - b. What are the rewards and challenges when working with families from different cultural backgrounds?
8. If you had 100% control over what goes on in your classroom, what changes would you make?
9. Do you feel prepared to work with children and families from different cultural backgrounds than you?
  - a. What has made you feel that way?
  - b. Where did you learn how to make the changes you talked about with children and families in your classroom?

Questions about higher education experience

1. Ask to complete a checklist of classes that they took in college. [see last page]
2. Was there a particular class you took that...
  - a. inspired you?
  - b. influenced your teaching?
  - c. was difficult for you?
  - d. [For each class, ask why and to describe that class a little.]
3. Please tell me how culture was talked about in your college class [use checklist again].
  - a. Whole classes or part of a class?
  - b. In class discussions, assignments, readings, etc.?
  - c. What topics related to culture do you remember learning about?
  - d. From your perspective, were there any parts of culture that were ignored / not talked about?
  - e. Please describe a specific event in which you (or professor or classmates) talked about culture in one of your classes.
  - f. Do you feel that you benefited from these experiences? Why?
  - g. [If they did not talk about culture in any of their classes, ask the following]
    - i. Do you think that culture should have been included in your classes? Why? How?
4. Please describe a specific time during college in which you worked with culturally diverse children.
5. What were your feelings about your teachers?
  - a. How did your professors teach?
  - b. Were there any professors from different cultural backgrounds than you?
  - c. Can you tell me a little bit about your interactions with these professors?
6. If you could change anything about your educational experience, what would you change?
7. Which do you think has prepared you more for working with children from different cultural backgrounds, your professional experiences or your education?



- a. Why do you think that?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?

This is a list of classes you may have taken in college. Please place a check by those classes that you took (with the majority of the class being about the listed topic).

- ☐ General child development
- ☐ Education and care of infants and toddlers
- ☐ Education and care of preschoolers
- ☐ Education and care of children with disabilities
- ☐ Working with families
- ☐ Working with children and families from diverse ethnic or cultural backgrounds
- ☐ Working with bilingual children learning English
- ☐ Assessment and observation of young children
- ☐ Emergent literacy and literacy strategies
- ☐ Numeracy and math for young children
- ☐ Social and emotional development of young children
- ☐ Physical health and motor development for young children
- ☐ Appropriate learning environments and activities for young children
- ☐ Classroom or behavioral management for young children
- ☐ Early childhood program administration
- ☐ Collaborating with professionals in other disciplines
- ☐ Professional knowledge (e.g., ethics and codes of conduct)
- ☐ Adult learning and development
- ☐ Leadership and advocacy
- ☐ Research and evaluation methods

[This list is taken from Maxwell, Lim, & Early, 2006.]

## APPENDIX B

### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Although understanding and correctly implementing the methods described above were essential to ensuring reliable results, there are several other aspects of research that were important to take into consideration. Specifically, openly addressing topics such as trustworthiness, validity, and ethics provide support to the rigor of the methods and confidence in the conclusions made based on the results. Each of these considerations are discussed below to demonstrate how I addressed these issues to increase the credibility of the current study.

**Trustworthiness and validity.** According to Maxwell “validity is not an inherent property of a particular method, but pertains to the data, accounts, or conclusions reached by using that method in a particular context for a particular purpose” (1992, p. 284). Further, Maxwell (2005) refers to validity as the credibility of the data collected and conclusions drawn from that data, as well as the strategies used to promote this credibility. As such, the measures used and questions asked in this study did not guarantee valid data and conclusions. Therefore, it was important to be aware of potential threats to validity in this study, as well as the strategies I used to address these threats.

Henwood (2004) suggested there are two types of validity that must be attended to in mixed method approaches. The first is methodological validity; this requires that the methods selected for use aligned with the research questions and constructs of interest.

Further, methodological validity necessitates that the methods used are implemented correctly and are consistent with the theoretical and empirical foundation of the larger methodology. For example, the use of phenomenology in the current study was conducted in a rigorous manner that adheres to the basic assumptions and purposes of that method.

There are several ways in which I guarded against threats to methodological validity. First, I selected quantitative methods of observation and survey that most appropriately measured the constructs of interest. Further, many of these instruments have been used in previous research to measure similar constructs; evidence of their validity is included in the descriptions of each instrument. However, it is important to note that though the observational measures did capture various components of classroom practices such as teacher-child interactions and classroom materials, none of the observational instruments addressed specifically teachers' cultural competence or practices with children from culturally diverse backgrounds. The selection of phenomenological interviews for qualitative data collection was also appropriate because my primary goal was to understand the essence of teachers' educational experience, as well as investigate the contexts that surrounded these experiences.

Additionally, as noted in the procedures, the implementation of these methods was consistent with the assumptions of the broader methodology for all of the tools used to collect data (observation, survey, and interview). Specifically, the observational tools all required several hours of observation and copious note taking to ensure accurate scoring of observed classroom materials, and teacher and child behaviors (Creswell, 2005). The

survey tools were reflective of self-report instruments in the goal to obtain participants' perspectives on their own beliefs, knowledge, and practices (Creswell). The interview procedure and questions were based upon the basic assumptions of phenomenology including investigating the essence of the teachers' experiences and using an unstructured interview protocol (Schram, 2006). Finally, the training and reliability measures outlined above helped to ensure that all data are collected in a rigorous, systematic manner.

The second type of validity considered is interpretive validity, which assesses if the conclusions drawn from the data were a result of thorough analysis and reflect the actual data collected. As Henwood (2004) noted, interpretive validity is achieved if "the interpretations [have] been derived in analytically supportable ways" (p. 47). Again, there were multiple ways through which I worked to attain interpretive validity. For all quantitative data, I worked with a statistical consultant to ensure correct analytic procedures and interpretations. In terms of the qualitative data, I used the following strategies outlined by Creswell (2007). First, during the data collection process, I "clarify[ied] researcher bias" (Creswell, p. 208) through maintaining a journal in which I recorded my preconceptions, feelings, and thoughts after each interview. I compared my journal notes to participants' transcripts during data analysis to ensure that my conclusions were based upon the participants' responses rather than my preconceptions.

After preliminary analyses were conducted, I utilized "peer debriefing" (Creswell, p. 208), and member checking strategies as other interpretive safeguards. The peer debriefing process served as another tool to ensure that my personal biases have not influenced the codes and themes. This process also helped to find any important pieces of

evidence or themes that have been overlooked in previous analyses. In addition, I used the member checking process described earlier. Member checking is a process through which interview participants review and give feedback on the credibility of preliminary themes and evidence. Maxwell (2005) noted that this strategy “is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say” (p. 111). Participants’ evaluations of the themes and supporting evidence were taken into consideration when finalizing the results of the qualitative portion. Finally, at the end of all quantitative and qualitative analyses, I reviewed all interpretations in reference to the research questions to ensure that the conclusions provide trustworthy, relevant answers (Henwood, 2004).

**Ethics and positioning.** Any research with human participants creates a multitude of ethical dilemmas; however, mixed methods research presents several unique dilemmas because of the variety of data collected, and the inclusion of qualitative methods that require direct contact with the participants (Maxwell, 2005; Schram, 2006). Additionally, the grounding of this study in feminist and critical theories necessitates a discussion of possible ethical issues in relation to the role of the researcher and participant. Although there were a variety of ethical issues to discuss, two primary topics were considered for this study; specifically, I needed to ensure that the participants were not treated as objects, and avoid the use of my power and privilege to oppress or betray participants (Christians, 2005; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Madison 2005).

First, scientific research can be conducted from a point of view that strives for distance between the researcher and those who are being researched. In order to create

this distance, researchers refrain from building relationships with participants and objectify their participants (Christians; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). With participants (or subjects) seen as objects, the primary ethical responsibilities of researchers then become informing subjects of research procedures and presenting accurate, unbiased, value-free data (Christians). As long as methods are followed correctly, subjects can be manipulated and their perspectives ignored (Christians; Guba & Lincoln). From feminist and critical perspectives, however, this value-free reality does not exist. Instead, participants and the relationships between researchers and participants are viewed as important components of the research process. Therefore, the participant is not to be treated as an object, but as a co-constructor with an essential role in making meaning (Christians; Guba & Lincoln; Maxwell, 2005).

In the qualitative portion of the study, the participants were treated as co-constructors by providing them the discursive space to speak freely about their experiences and beliefs, as well as through the member-checking process. Although quantitative methods do not offer much opportunity for participants to co-construct knowledge, I made sure to demonstrate respect for the participants as persons by being open about the study and answering any questions that participants had about the survey measures or the study in general. Additionally, as the use of quantitative data can be construed as “objective”, I acknowledge that each participant had their own interpretations of the self-report data, and that the quantitative results are only a part of the larger picture of teachers’ beliefs, knowledge, and practices with children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Further, it is important to acknowledge that I asked the participants to trust me with personal information about themselves and their work in both the survey and interview methods (Madison, 2005). Participants may not have been comfortable sharing such private information, especially in knowing that their responses may be presented in scholarly or policy avenues (Schram, 2006). Therefore, I discussed with participants their right to confidentiality and the fact that I will not use any specific identifying information in the presentation of the results (Christians, 2005). I am also careful to present their findings in ways that humanize their participants and demonstrate the complexity of their lives and experiences (Maxwell, 2005). As Denzin suggested this “means taking seriously lives that are loaded with multiple interpretations and grounded in cultural complexity.... accounts should possess that amount of depth, detail, emotionality, nuance, and coherence that will permit a critical consciousness to be formed by the reader. Such texts should also exhibit representational adequacy, including the absence of racial, class, and gender stereotyping” (as cited in Christians, 2005, p. 152). In this study, I did this by valuing and accurately representing the participants’ voices and providing the participants with the opportunity to voice concerns over these representations (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005).

Another important ethical issue in research, especially qualitative methods, deals with the unequal power relations between researcher and participant (Madison, 2005; Maxwell, 2005; Stake, 2005). Because researchers are often well-educated representatives of high powered institutions, are able to remove themselves from research settings, and have power to represent the voices and experiences of others, they are

necessarily in a place of privilege over the participants (Christians, 2005; Madison). Therefore, it is important for researchers to not use this power and privilege to dehumanize or oppress their participants (Cannella & Lincoln, 2009). Moreover, trust and intimacy that is established when co-constructing knowledge can be transformed easily into betrayal (Christians). The ways in which researchers can prevent oppression and betrayal are similar to those noted above: Researchers should relate to participants authentically, make caring for the participants as human a priority, and include participants in the research process (Christians; Madison; Maxwell). Additionally, Cannella and Lincoln suggest that researchers need to be aware of how scholarly discourses are used. Rather than use obscure, theoretical jargon with participants, it is important that researchers speak in “plain prose” (p. 59) to ensure they are understood by their participants and the consumers of their research. As noted earlier, I was honest with participants when discussing the study, interviews, or my personal work and perspectives with participants. Moreover, I tried to make sure that all participants understood the language that I used in surveys and interviews. I also made it a point to make the interviews convenient for teachers so they did not have to change their work schedule or plans.

The process of self-reflection was also important in guarding against mistreatment of participants and misrepresentation of their experiences. I acknowledge that I am in a position of privilege both in reference to the diverse children that may be affected by this research and to the teachers who participate in the study. I am very aware of my identity as a White, English-speaking, middle-class, protestant, and educated female. Although



my ethnic and cultural identity matched that of many of in-service teachers, it also placed me in a position of privilege over individuals from diverse backgrounds (Cannella & Lincoln, 2009). This could have been problematic to my being open to other ways of knowing, teaching, and learning that are valued by other ethnicities and cultures (Madison, 2005).

Despite my personal and professional commitment to trying to understand and value all types of people in the world, I would be remiss to say that I never hold biased perspectives against individuals from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, throughout the research process I tried to be explicit my efforts to understand my own subjectivity and how it influenced my work and the participants. I kept a journal of my thoughts, feelings, and reactions to occurrences in the surveys and interviews and discussed any problems or difficulties with colleagues. As stated earlier, the member-checking process also helped to ensure that my interpretations of the data are true co-constructions of knowledge, rather than reflect my perspectives and biases (Christians, 2005; Madison; Maxwell 2005).